Cricket First Test: England v Australia

England sprint to Ashes triumph

Mike Selvey at Edgbaston

EVEN by the standards of an already remarkable summer, the scenes here last Sunday night were the stuff of dreams. The pavilion clock was edging round towards seven o'clock when Alec Stewart clubbed Shane Warne to the extra-cover boundary to win a match that had been England's for the taking since the astonishing events of the first morning.

Australia, in their second innings, were dismissed for 477, with three wickets apiece to Darren Gough, Robert Croft and Mark Ealham. The last nine wickets fell for 150 against an attack that never wavered in its endeavour.

It left England an entire day plus Sunday's 24 overs — and an additional eight if a result were on the cards — to score 118 runs. That target is three fewer than Australia made when they chased 115 in 1981 and Botham charged England to victory. Perish the thought: 11 came from Glenn McGrath's first over and, although Mark Butcher was lbw to Michael Kasprowicz, the run-rate never wavered.

Michael Atherton's boundary brought up 50 inside nine overs, Stewart's clip to midwicket the hundred inside 20. The win by 9 wickets came at a gallop from 21.3 overs with 15 balls of normal time left.

It was heady stuff, roared to the rafters by an ecstatic crowd. Chariots were Swung Low and the Ashes were Coming Home. It is early days for that theme yet, but the margin of this win, following the one-day victories, shows that at last England has a side to compete with the best.

Atherton, equalling Peter May's record 41 matches as captain, wants this series and he wants it badly. He played majestically at times, hitting nine fours in his 57, having added 90 in 18 overs with Stewart, who made 39. On the way Atherton passed 5,000 Test runs, something achieved by only 11 other Englishmen.

It had not been the easiest of days none the less. The Australian fightback last Saturday had shown such sense of purpose that they threatened to force a sufficient lead to let Warne loose on a wearing pitch.

With Australia 256 for the loss of Matthew Elliott overnight, Atherton opted to take the new ball from the start and, though Greg Blewett was occasionally beaten by Andrew Caddick, he completed his century, his third in three Ashes Tests.

It was Croft, who made the breakthrough when Taylor misjudged his flight, stopped his shot and offered a return catch that the bowler gratefully accepted. Taylor's 129 had taken more than 6½ hours, and he and Blewett had taken their second-wicket partnership to 194.

Mark Waugh went cheaply, giving England hope. Blewett followed by pushing forward stiffly and was caught at silly mid-off from pad and glove, his 125 containing 19 fours and a six. Gough then blew away the middle order in an inspired spell broken only by a 70-minute break for rain. The end of the innings was unexpectedly swift when Ealham quickly claimed the wickets of Healy, Kasprowicz and Warne.

On the opening day, 14 wickets fell. The visitors were bowled out for 118 and England reached 200 for three. Graham Thorpe and Nasser Hussain dominated the proceedings on the second day, Thorpe making 138, his fifth Test century and his third against Australia. Hussain went on to score a career-best 207, which brought him the Man of the Match honour. Ealham and Croft made useful contributions to England's total on Saturday before Australia began their fightback.



The celebrations begin at Edgbaston PHOTOGRAPH: LAWRENCE GRIFFITHS

Readers with Internet access can follow the Australian tour and Test matches at http://www.ashes.co.uk

Scoreboard

AUSTRALIA — First Innings

M A Taylor c Butcher b Malcolm	7
M T G Elliott b Gough	6
G S Blewett c Hussain b Gough	7
M E Waugh b Gough	5
S R Waugh c Stewart b Caddick	12
M G Bevan c Ealham b Malcolm	8
I A Healy c Stewart b Caddick	0
J N Gillespie lbw b Caddick	4
S K Warne c Malcolm b Caddick	47
M S Kasprowicz c Butcher b Caddick	17
G D McGrath not out	1
Extras (w2, nb2)	4
Total (31.5 overs)	118

Bowling: Gough 10-1-43-3, Malcolm 10-2-25-2; Caddick 11.5-1-50-5.

ENGLAND — First Innings

M A Butcher c Healy b Kasprowicz	8
M A Atherton c Healy b McGrath	2
A J Stewart c Elliott b Gillespie	18
N Hussain c Healy b Warne	207
G P Thorpe c Bevan b McGrath	138
J P Crawley c Healy b Kasprowicz	1
M A Ealham not out	53
R D B Croft c Healy b Kasprowicz	24
D Gough c Healy b Kasprowicz	0
A R Caddick lbw b Bevan	0
Extras (b4, lb7, w1, nb15)	27
Total (for 9 dec, 138.4 overs)	478

Bowling: McGrath 32-8-107-2, Kasprowicz 39-8-113-4; Gillespie 10-1-48-1; Warne 35-8-110-1, Bevan 10.4-0-44-1, S R Waugh 12-2-45-0.

AUSTRALIA — Second Innings

M T G Elliott b Croft	66
M A Taylor c & b Croft	129
G S Blewett c Butcher b Croft	125
S R Waugh lbw b Gough	33
M G Bevan c Hussain b Gough	24
M E Waugh c Stewart b Gough	1
I A Healy c Atherton b Ealham	30
S K Warne c & b Ealham	32
M S Kasprowicz c Butcher b Ealham	0
J N Gillespie run out	0
G D McGrath not out	0
Extras (b18, lb12, w2, nb5)	37
Total (144.4 overs)	477

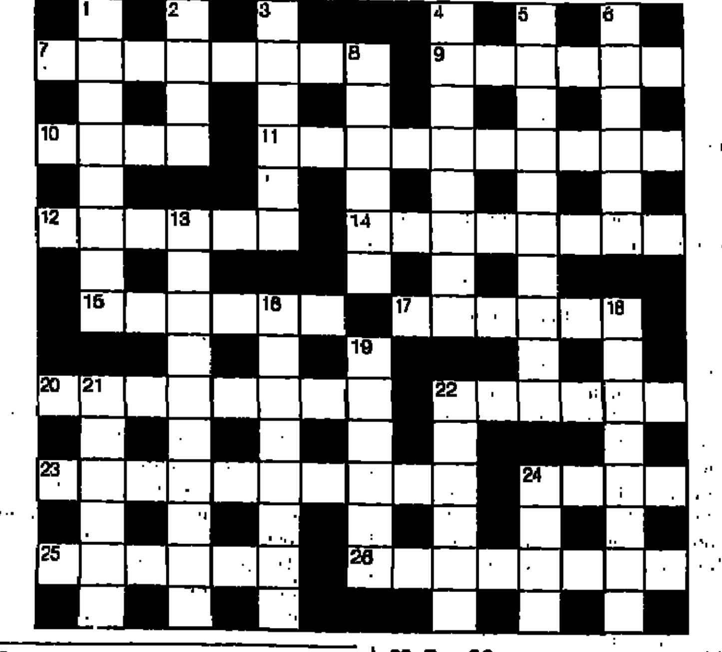
Bowling: Gough 35-7-123-3, Malcolm 21-6-52-0; Croft 43-10-125-3, Caddick 30-6-87-0, Ealham 15.4-3-60-3.

ENGLAND — Second Innings

M A Butcher lbw b Kasprowicz	14
M A Atherton not out	57
A J Stewart not out	40
Extras (b4, lb4)	8
Total (for 1, 21.3 overs)	119

Bowling: McGrath 7-1-42-0; Kasprowicz 7-0-42-1; Warne 7.3-0-27-0.

Cryptic crossword by Bunthorne



Across

7 See 11
9 A state corporation holding open court (6)
10 See 11
11,10,7 Thrifty ferret hadn't paid accident insurance (5,5,4,3,5)
12 Tree feller's decree (6)
14 "Be of — the doubl —" (Toplady's cushy number) (8)
15 Lean on me when acne's unbearable (6)
17 An original endorsement backing the Czech crown (6)
20 Right of use winning Crufts superior double (8)
22 See 26
23 Awfully bad pun: call around, there's a catch in it (3,3,4)
24 Poet's endless stream (4)
25 Divine redhead in Zodiac astrology (6)
26,22ac Financial crash leaving but reduced balance sheet with obese hula dancers (5,3,6)

Down

1 Name the crown dependencies falling into disrepute, having made a bloomer (8)
2 Pen-point putting the lid on it? On the contrary (4)
3 German races on without Brussels (6)
4 West African participant in "One Man and His Dog" (8)
5 Kiev's cover studied by many in Birmingham book (10)
6 Watch that horse! (6)
8 This time, take in Tantalus's torment (6)
13 Bionic polymath? (3,2,5)
16 "10,24ac and — 22ac" (Macbeth) (8)
18 Rash perpetrator would make accusations about the right number (8)
19 Shooting s-stars cut no ice! (6)
21 22 ac's partner's a nobody with Pip (6)
22 Nightingale heard by two of New York's finest (6)
24 Ilkley Moor's without foreign currency (4)

Last week's solution

A		S		T		L		P		R		M		S
P	A	T	C	H	O	U	L	I		H	E	A	T	H
O		A		E		K		L		E		R		I
S	A	R	D	I	N	E		E	T	O	N	I	A	N
T		W		S				D		S		A		
R	E	A	L	M		R	U	R	I	T	A	N	I	A
O		R				E		I		A				N
P	O	S	I	T	I	V	E	V	E	T	T	I	N	G
H				A		O		E				N		L
E	A	S	T	C	O	K	E	R		G	U	S	T	O
		E		I		I				R		U		P
W	I	N	S	T	O	N		S	T	E	A	L	T	H
O		I		U		G		I		A		T		I
R	U	L	E	R		L	O	N	G	S	P	E	L	L
D		E		N		Y		K		E		D		E

Rugby Union Second Test: Argentina 33 England 13

Pumas take their revenge

Mervyn Brewer in Buenos Aires

A WEEK is a long time in rugby union, as well as in politics. England's players were on a high after a hard-won victory in the first Test, but last Saturday they must have wished for a hole to open up in which to disappear after all the pre-match optimism.

It was not quite a mauling, but the Pumas did a fair bit of damage nevertheless and were thoroughly delighted with their own rapid transformation.

They had run out of puff the first time around and there is nothing much you can do about that in a week. The assumption, in that case, is that England were feeling tired, not to mention missing absent friends.

It had been a difficult and disruptive week for the tourists, with the Lions calls for Catt and Redman causing much resentment among the management.

England made a poor start when they gave Quesada a simple penalty chance. It was the first time England had failed to score first on this tour, an ominous sign.

They almost fell further behind when the prop, Grau, made deep inroads and the flanker Fernandez-Lobbe drove over England's line. Fortunately for England, Haag and De Glanville got under the ball to prevent a score.

It was all proving much tougher than the first encounter on a blustery, chilly afternoon, and England could only express relief as Quesada made a hash of two further penalty attempts.

Typically, frustration began to show among the Pumas and when Grewcock received some gratuitous shoeing at a ruck, blows and words were exchanged.

Quesada could not keep missing, of course, and when England continued their bad offside habits, he landed a straight kick from long range.

That was after 25 minutes and England had hardly been in Argentine territory. When they did get there Mapletoft missed a penalty. And worse was to follow. Mallinder and Adebayo had a mix-up, the ball went loose and Soler picked up and ran in from 40 yards, with Quesada converting.

Mapletoft did land a penalty before the break, but England's play was a far cry from the efforts seven days earlier, and Argentina moved beyond recall after the interval.

● The Lions were beaten 35-30 by Northern Transvaal in Pretoria, their first provincial defeat in South Africa for 29 years.

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The Washington Post · Le Monde

Bickering mars HK handover

Andrew Higgins in Hong Kong

IT HAS come to this. A century and a half after battling for Hong Kong with cannons in an epochal clash of East and West, China and Britain are now squabbling over how many seconds before midnight on June 30 a British military band must finish belting out the last bars of God Save the Queen.

Also under testy debate has been the shape of the stage, the size of the flags and the vexed issue of a wind machine to keep the Union flag fluttering right to the end at an indoor handover ceremony to be attended by the Prince of Wales, Tony Blair, the head of the Chinese Communist party and 4,000 of their friends.

"It is an absolute nightmare. We should have just put the key under the mat and left," said a British official struggling to script the last moments of imperial pomp.

A Hong Kong psychiatrist, Orlando Wong, warned that the end of British rule could trigger hysteria among the psychologically vulnerable. Most at risk may be British and Chinese diplomats locked in endless discussion of mind-numbing protocol minutiae.

Adding menace to the diplomats' monotony, China has hinted that Britain could have trouble getting out with dignity if it does not co-operate and allow the People's Liberation Army into Hong Kong armed and ready for action before the clock strikes midnight. Britain has refused, though it may allow China to beef up an advance guard of 200 unarmed soldiers already in town.

The two countries agreed in October 1995 that the ceremony should be "solemn, grand and decent", but have been quarrelling about what this means ever since. Many weeks of negotiation went into a recent breakthrough: the Chinese flag at the ceremony will be wider but shorter than the Union flag. A machine is being installed to prevent them going limp.

An interim legislature formed by China to replace the elected assembly is to be sworn in immediately after the formal handover. Mr Blair and the US secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, will boycott this investiture but have failed to mobilise a mass walkout by allies such as Australia. The disputed handpicked legislature last week held the latest in a series of controversial sessions across the border in Shenzhen and rammed through legislation curbing the right of assembly and association after July 1.

A particularly prickly problem has been the timing of the British and Chinese national anthems. Britain wants to end God Save the Queen and haul down the Union flag at exactly midnight. But China wants what it calls zero hour for itself. A British diplomat suggested that the solution might be a grace period of five seconds on either side of midnight.

Even seasoned diplomats are finding it hard to keep their calm. In public they mutter terse, diplomatic regrets. "It is very unfortunate that we cannot have what could have a been a good demonstration of harmony," said Hugh Davies, the head of the Sino-British joint liaison group.

Best foot forward . . . Chinese soldiers rehearse for a performance to be held during the Hong Kong handover celebrations PHOTO: WILL BURGESS

Comment, page 16

Jobs deal keeps EU summit sweet

John Palmer and Michael White in Amsterdam

EUROPEAN Union leaders on Monday unveiled a radical new strategy for tackling Europe's jobs crisis, including large-scale investment in small businesses and employment in education, health and environmental protection.

The new strategy emerged at the Amsterdam summit as part of a package of measures to boost jobs and growth in tandem with a single-currency stability pact designed to keep the launch of monetary union on target for January 1999.

At the heart of the jobs package is a $1,100 million loan facility from the European Investment Bank (EIB), which will be expanded as the bank raises more money on behalf of the EU.

In one of the friendliest summit encounters between Britain and its EU partners for many years, Tony Blair also won his spurs by obtaining assurances necessary to protect Britain's future control of its borders, visa, immigration and asylum policy.

But on Monday the British Prime Minister was still trying to persuade his fellow heads of government to abandon proposals for an eventual merger of the EU and its putative defence arm, the Western European Union. British ministers were confident of success.

The only problem in the way of Britain's agreement to the new Amsterdam treaty was the fine-tuning of its protection from rulings of the European Court of Justice on police and judicial co-operation, such as sensitive custody cases. "We have got to get an absolute legal security," Mr Blair said, confirming that there was "a growing understanding of that here".

Reflecting the new mood of British "constructive engagement" in Europe, he went out of his way to avoid any suggestion that disagreement would result in any threat of a British veto — in sharp contrast to Tory rhetoric at previous summits.

The prospects of an agreement ending the dispute over fish quota hopping also rose. It emerged that in future at least 50 per cent of fish caught by British flagged, foreign owned vessels will have to be landed in Britain.

Mr Blair expressed pleasure at a report issued by the European Commission on the fishing issue but it has yet to be agreed by the Spanish government, which operates the largest number of foreign boats in British waters.

The breakthrough over jobs and the monetary union stability pact was announced by the delighted Dutch prime minister, Wim Kok. "I am very proud and satisfied to tell you that we have reached complete agreement," he said.

The Commission president, Jacques Santer, declared that the way was now open for the EU to meet its promised target for launching the single currency in 1999.

The EU leaders called on the EIB to boost investment in major infrastructure schemes and hi-tech projects. But the bank was also asked to "examine its scope of intervention in the areas of education, health, urban environment and environmental protection."

In effect the EIB will be asked to shoulder part of the financing of "socially useful employment" projects together with governments and the private sector.

The summit also underlined its commitment to making employment its top priority when it ratified a jobs chapter in the new European Union treaty. By drawing on the EIB and other lending bodies, the leaders avoided a clash over French demands for new spending on jobs from the EU's own budget.

Comment, page 16
Le Monde, page17

Austria	AS30	Malta	50c
Belgium	BF75	Netherlands	G 4.75
Denmark	DK16	Norway	NK 16
Finland	FM 10	Portugal	E300
France	FF 13	Saudi Arabia	SR 0.50
Germany	DM 4	Spain	P 300
Greece	DR 460	Sweden	SK 19
Italy	L 3,000	Switzerland	SF 3.50

Killings leave Ulster peace in ruins

David Sharrock

THE IRA's murder of two police officers in Northern Ireland on Monday ended Tony Blair's brief venture into dialogue with its political wing, Sinn Fein, and with it hopes of reviving the peace process, according to nationalist and unionist politicians.

The double killing was carried out in a street in Lurgan, Co Armagh, where children were playing, by two disguised Provisionals who shot their victims in the back of the head. It brought immediate charges by both British and Irish premiers of "cynicism and hypocrisy", directed at the Sinn Fein president, Gerry Adams, after he refused to condemn the murders.

Speaking at the European Union inter-governmental conference in Amsterdam, Mr Blair said there was "obviously no question" of a further meeting between officials and Sinn Fein. "It is difficult to interpret this latest attack as anything but a signal that Sinn Fein and the IRA are not interested in peace and democracy and prefer violence."

Mr Blair's words and actions follow just two meetings between government officials and Sinn Fein, the second of which was said to have gone badly. A third meeting was left to be arranged, but the IRA attempted to lure security forces into a 450kg bomb ambush in Belfast.

With Sinn Fein's route back out of the wilderness now closed down again by Mr Blair, it is difficult to see how the spread of violence can now be contained.

The incoming Irish prime minister, Bertie Ahern, whose Fianna Fail party will shortly form a minority government, was under pressure to rescind his promise that he would meet Mr Adams this week. He assumes office next week.

The two RUC men were named as Constable John Graham, aged 34, and full-time Reserve Constable David Andrew Johnston, aged 30.

Loyalist politicians admitted they could have difficulty holding back the paramilitary factions from formally ending their October 1994 ceasefire. The Ulster Unionist leader, David Trimble, said that with the Drumcree Orange parade due to take place next month 15km away, the timing and location of the killings was no accident. "This is a deliberate act by the IRA to try and provoke violence from loyalists," he said.

Hidden evidence shows Japan is no utopia

IN HIS article on Japan, Kevin Sullivan deluges us with generalisations about the utopian nature of Japanese society (Cost of economic equality questioned, June 8). I wonder what form his research took. Were he to come to Osaka, he could soon find lots of "desperate slums" and all the evidence of Western-style income gaps he would need to stop spouting the traditional guff forthwith.

There is plenty of social inequality in Japan, though compared with elsewhere it simply does not show so much. Japanese people on the whole are not given to obvious vandalism on the scale seen in cities in the United States and Europe, reasoning perhaps that the last thing poor people need is to smash up what little they have. The stolen and burned-out cars neatly tucked away in the graffiti-blackened underpass behind our house tell their own story, however, as do the pathetic slot machines selling cheap *sake* for the itinerant drunks.

It is extraordinarily difficult to look rich here, as the purchasing power of money is subject to the law of diminishing returns on a level unimaginable in a society where land is not at such a premium.

As for the low crime rate and family cohesion, an hour or so with some Japanese housewives would furnish a writer with enough stories of spouse desertion, loan fraud, alcoholism, wife beating and general brutality to fill a book. So much goes on that never makes the papers. Litigation is another Western custom that people here have been slow to adopt, which explains the disparity between the divorce rate and the far larger number of people living apart from their families.

Japan is in many ways a fine country, but I fear Mr Sullivan is not yet in possession of the whole picture — perhaps because he is writing from southern Kyushu, the Japanese equivalent of Minnesota. It is perhaps a mistake to draw conclusions about the country as a whole on the basis of the social and economic conditions of such areas.
Paul Callomon,
Yao, Osaka, Japan

THE CONSISTENTLY readable Kevin Sullivan invites comment when he blandly repeats what I assume must be government figures of a 99.9 per cent literacy rate in Japan. That less than 130,000 people are illiterate is simply not credible, as the figure cannot be reconciled with the number of people who lack the mental acuity to be literate through handicap and illness etc. This figure, which is often repeated, has more to do with disguising an incredibly cumbersome writing system and the shortcomings of rote based education.
Lindsay Venner,
Tokyo, Japan

Taliban rule does not mean peace

PHIL GOODWIN, writing about the Taliban in Afghan town of Mazar-i-Sharif, has equated "peace" with a military takeover by one faction, which has received backing from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia (Taliban win end-game as last city falls, June 1). The Taliban were given military training in Pakistan. They grew up isolated from Afghan culture, communities and families, lacking contact with any women, including mothers, sisters, cousins and aunts. They are the product of an inhumane, militarised process of indoctrination. The Taliban do not represent the more conservative views of traditional Afghan society, but rather an outside group that was formed to take over the country by military means. Their ability to take more than two-thirds of the territory of Afghanistan is related to their foreign financial backing and their profits from the drug trade, which has enabled them to buy off various warlords. They were driven out of Mazar 72 hours after taking it over. Their total occupation of Afghanistan is not assured.

Related to the misunderstanding of peace and the role of the Taliban is the article's dismissal of the serious human rights violations against the Afghan people, women and men, throughout the regions under Taliban control. The concluding paragraph equates Taliban attacks on human rights of women with "tradition" and implies that domestic incarceration of women is acceptable to "most Afghans".

The Afghanistan described is a one-dimensional fiction. The Taliban cannot bring peace by waging war on the peoples of Afghanistan and their human rights. Real peace means that people have a say in who governs them and that their basic human rights are respected. There will be no peace unless all Afghans, women and men, can participate in the peace process and the rehabilitation of the country.
Pamela Collett,
Nairobi, Kenya

Will Cook's pledge last?

IT WAS encouraging and heart-warming to read of the new British Labour government's commitment to pursue a foreign policy based on ethical and human rights considerations (Cook gives pledge on human rights, May 18). But how many times have we heard well-intentioned governments come into power, with noble ideals, only to be cowed and manipulated by big business and Foreign Office mandarins into pursuing policies that destroy lives, favour the greedy and turn a blind eye to human rights abuses?

We should not hold our breath while Robin Cook gets to know his new buddies: the oil companies, the arms traders and the dictators, who will assure him of the sanctity of British interests so long as he keeps an open mind.
R Munyango,
Kampala, Uganda

ROBIN COOK'S welcome pledge will be tested when there is a conflict between human rights and arms sales. There will be inevitable pressure to "protect British jobs" and to foster "constructive engagement" with repressive regimes — in short, to continue business as usual.

The last Labour government had a system for grading the human rights performance of particular countries. Grading was, however, used for "internal purposes", ie it was secret, made little discernible impact on policy and was easily halted by the Conservatives.

If such a grading system were reintroduced, and this time made public as part of the promised annual country reports on human rights, it could provide a valuable mechanism to ensure consistent treatment of foreign regimes across departments. The worst offenders could be isolated and a system of graduated sanctions applied to them.
James Mahon,
Dartford, Kent

Beige is just the beginning

YOUR article on people of mixed race (Black, white and every shade between, June 1) paints an interesting picture of a melting-pot Britain for the next century. In the 1960s, the pop group Blue Mink sang about this very same melting-pot turning out "coffee-coloured people by the score".

The results of the latest Policy Studies Institute report appear to show that 30 years later, integration does not necessarily lead to advance. The reality is that, despite the undoubted academic and social progress of the black and Asian communities, manifesting itself in a flourishing middle class, the glass ceiling seems to prevent true acceptance. In a profoundly multi-cultural country with, I believe, one of the best records of good community relations anywhere in the world, it is folly to raise expectations only to dash them.

The challenge is two-fold. First, firm and strong laws to tackle discrimination, with effective sanctions for those who break them. Second, the ability of those with power to demonstrate their willingness to allow Britain's vibrant ethnic minority communities a stake in society.
Keith Vaz MP,
House of Commons, London

"*BLACK*, White . . ." touches on one of the most important phenomena of human evolution: the coming disappearance of separate races in human society. In a hundred years, our confusion and debate about "mixed races" will have lost its significance.

The most important implication of this "staggering rate" of intermarriage is the impending disappearance of the so-called "white" race. If "Black Britain is going beige", so is "White Britain", (along with other countries). Given the relative size of populations worldwide, the "white" race will be gone first. In northern Europe and North America, the white race is ageing and, other things remaining the same, will go into a steep decline in numbers.

The article notes the changing face of urban streets in the UK as non-whites and rich blends of colour increase rapidly. The same is true in North America. To a significant extent, the increasing racial mixture in Britain results from liberal immigration policies toward people from countries of the former empire. The empire is coming home to roost. We are all now scratching our heads over what to do about immigration, but whatever we do, the flow of immigrants will continue, and the racial mix increase ever faster.

Soon "race" will have to disappear from census questions and similar form filling as it becomes increasingly meaningless even though, in their own communities, people will retain whatever cultural and ethnic values best express their own lives.
James E Gander,
Ottawa, Canada

Briefly

I TAKE issue with Leslie Plommer's definition of Canadians as a "perennially unhappy people" (May 25). The fact that we have such a colourful political spectrum suggests only that we enjoy democracy to the full and have taken a proprietary interest in each of our own regions and in issues that often transcend our unwieldy federal system. Frustrated, bewildered and angry at times, yes. But for the most part, we are a fairly mellow, accepting people who try to resolve problems peacefully.
Mary Lou Routley,
University College of the Cariboo, Kamloops, BC, Canada

I ENJOYED the paradigm of the late 20th century that your finance page of May 18 represented. Below the flagship article celebrating the arrival of Gordon Brown at the Treasury appeared a neat black torpedo in the shape of projected job losses for 2000 people following the $33 billion merger of Guinness and Grand Met. Let's hope that the Captain is keeping a careful watch and, even more piously, that one day perhaps business people will not slough off their humanity at the office door.
Max Monsarrat,
Latouille-Lentillac, St Céré, France

KAY BRIDGER'S patronising way with the few words of Bahasa Indonesia she uses suggests she understands little of what she writes (May 18). During 20 years in and out of Jakarta with my Sumatran wife, I never heard a skyscraper referred to as *gunung*, let alone gunungs. (The plural is formed by repeating the word, as in gunung-gunung, or gunung2 in writing; or you might say barisan gunung, a mountain range.) But they are *gedung*, buildings, as in Gedung Landmark, so she may have misheard.
E S Webber,
Cairns, Queensland, Australia

AS A BRITISH ex-pat who has to return once a year to the UK for my Marks & Spencer "fix", I read with uncontrollable excitement the note (June 1) that the company's next incursion may be into the Latin American market. On this side of the Atlantic, Miami is known as the "capital of Latin America". I trust M&S is aware of this fact.
Vicki Burbidge,
Miami, Florida, USA

LIKE P SHIELD (June 1) I don't understand what all the fuss over Deep Blue and Kasparov is all about. I bought a little computerised chess set a few years ago and so far have beaten it three times, and then only when it is set at its easiest level. What does this prove, other than that I am terrible at chess?
Peter Squibb,
Vaison-la-Romain, France

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Croatia leader celebrates win in 'flawed' poll

Eugene Brcic in Zagreb

PRESIDENT Franjo Tudjman was revelling this week in his re-election as Croatia's leader, but international monitors criticised the vote as deeply flawed. Other candidates who had promised more democracy said the win was tarnished by a low turnout in last Sunday's poll.

It was the first time foreign observers had been so critical of an election in Croatia since its 1991 war of independence from the old Yugoslav federation. Mr Tudjman's Croatia has come under increasing fire for its undemocratic ways and poor treatment of minority Serbs.

Croats also appear to be growing disillusioned with Mr Tudjman. Although he is widely respected as father of his country's age-old dream of independence, about 40 per cent of the electorate stayed at home last Sunday.

International monitors for the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) said the elections did not meet minimum democratic standards.

"Croatia has experienced a free but not fair election," said Paul Simon, a former American senator who headed a team of 100 OSCE monitors. "Candidates were able to speak freely . . . but the process leading up to the election was fundamentally flawed."

The OSCE's report cited gross media favouritism, vastly disparate campaign resources, disenfranchisement of minority Serbs, and regulations that allowed Croats in Bosnia and other countries to vote. They comprised up to 10 per cent of the electorate, at least 377,000 voters. Mr Simon hinted that Croatia will not get much help, nor its desired integration with the West, if it does not do better.

With 98 per cent of the votes counted, Mr Tudjman collected 61.4 per cent. Vlado Gotovac, a Social Liberal supported by nine other small parties, won 17.5 per cent, and Zdravko Tomac, a Social Democrat, 21 per cent.

Both had promised a more democratic, Western-style state — and both did better than expected. — *AP*

Pol Pot 'makes last stand'

Nick Cumming Bruce in Bangkok, and Peter Hillmore

THE curtain looks set to fall on the career of Pol Pot, who led and inspired the Khmer Rouge's genocidal rule in Cambodia in the late 1970s. Government leaders claim he will be their prisoner within days and then be put on trial before an international tribunal.

Cambodia's first prime minister, Prince Norodom Ranariddh, maintained on Monday that Pol Pot had fled towards the Thai border, pursued by dissident Khmer Rouge forces.

Before he made his escape through the jungle on a stretcher, reportedly with intravenous drips hanging from his arms, the ailing 69-year-old Pol Pot ordered the execution of a top lieutenant, Son Sen, along with his wife and 10 members of their family. Defecting Khmer Rouge officials have produced six photographs that show Son Sen shot in the right temple and cheek, and his wife shot in the left ear.

The claim cannot be confirmed. Some analysts believe the former leader may have died last year but that his followers kept up the pretence that he was alive to enhance their bargaining power with Phnom Penh.

But photographs of Son Sen's body appear to confirm reports that the Khmer Rouge is disintegrating in a final spasm of violence. Son Sen had been Pol Pot's chief executioner, responsible for the torture and killing of 10,000 people at Tuol Sleng prison and for the mass evacuation of Phnom Penh during the brutal Khmer Rouge regime.

Cambodia's deputy army chief of staff, General Nhek Bunchhay, said that Son Sen had been executed last week. He told a news conference in Phnom Penh that Pol Pot was in rough jungle terrain about 20km east of Anlong Veng. At least three senior Khmer Rouge officials were being held as hostages. He said he was basing his reports on Khmer Rouge sources he had spoken to around Anlong Veng.

Gen Bunchhay said that he had asked the ministry of defence to send weapons and ammunition to the rebels thought to be fighting Pol Pot and up to 300 of his followers.

"This is the end of the Khmer Rouge," Prince Ranariddh said. About 95 per cent of the guerrillas from the Khmer Rouge's base at Anlong Veng and a division led by Pol Pot — including four top officials — had decided to defect to the Phnom Penh government, he said.

A photograph of Son Sen's body is shown at a press conference. Pol Pot reportedly ordered his execution last week

Cambodia's co-minister of the interior, Sar Keng, was more cautious. He said there were six divisions ready to defect in Anlong Veng and two more that remained loyal to Pol Pot, but the government needed more information on the intentions of both groups.

It is clear that 20 years after first seizing power, the Khmer Rouge leadership is disintegrating, but many experts treat the reports with caution. "It's been a wishful desire to kill off Pol Pot and the entire Khmer Rouge for years," said journalist John Pilger. "The one certain truth is that the movement still controls at least a quarter of the country and is courted by the factions in Phnom Penh."

According to Prince Ranariddh, Pol Pot was still holding senior figures hostage, including the president of the Khmer Rouge's provisional government, Khieu Samphan.

He said Christopher Howes, a Briton abducted in March 1996 in Cambodia's northwest, was also thought to be with the group. And a rebel commander, Ta Mok, had broken with Pol Pot and disappeared, he said.

But it is unclear how much information is being distorted for political advantage.

Prince Ranariddh — who revealed on Monday that he had met Khieu Samphan and two of his associates last month — appeared to be heading for a showdown with his co-prime minister, Hun Sen, who has warned that officials who negotiate with the Khmer Rouge should be arrested.

Thousands of Khmer Rouge guerrillas have defected to the government since last summer, but Pol Pot has held out in the jungle with a hardline faction including about 2,000 fighters.

Former leaders, such as the Khmer Rouge foreign minister, Ieng Sary, have been pardoned for their pivotal roles in the genocidal rule of Cambodia in which millions died between 1975 and 1979, though reconciliation with Pol Pot is ruled out — King Norodom Sihanouk has called him one of "the biggest criminals" in Cambodian history.

Cambodia's government appeared sharply divided on whether to back war against the rapidly unravelling Khmer Rouge. Officials loyal to the co-premiers, who share power in an unhappy political alliance, presented contradictory plans on how best to deal with the rebels responsible for the 1975-79 "killing fields" regime. Some ministers want co-operation with factions in the Khmer Rouge, while others are totally against any dealings.

Hun Sen, said last week that the government should stand clear and let the equally ruthless Khmer Rouge factions destroy each other. "We sit on the mountaintop and watch the tiger and lion fight each other," Hun Sen said.

"Let them be injured first so we can capture them. Then we will inspect our options," he said.

Seven richest could end world poverty

Larry Elliott and Victoria Brittain

THE combined wealth of the world's seven richest men could wipe out poverty and provide access to basic social services for the quarter of the world who live in severe need, according to a United Nations study published last week.

In a call for urgent action to attack global deprivation, the report called for a new Marshall plan to rid the world of extreme poverty by early in the next century.

The annual United Nations Human Development Report indicated the growing disparity between rich and poor around the world — with the net wealth of 10 billionaires worth 1.5 times the combined national income of the 48 least developed countries.

The UN report said that an $80 billion anti-poverty programme — providing access to basic social services, and income transfers to the poverty-stricken — would be less than the net wealth of just seven billionaires.

Richard Jolly, the report's main author, said: "What is needed is a 20-year Marshall plan. Without that sort of big thinking we are still going to be struggling with the problem of Africa in the middle of the next century. "It is an ethical scandal that we do not provide the basics of education and health for everyone in a world with a $25 trillion economy."

Dr Jolly noted that there had been "a worrying slowdown in the battle against world poverty".

The report shows that, for the first time since 1990, in the last year 30 countries have shown a decline in the Human Development Index (HDI) — the report's key measure of poverty.

The HDI is measured by literacy, life expectancy, and access to health services, safe water and adequate food.

The UN said recent setbacks were all the more startling against a background of dramatic successes in poverty reduction in countries as varied as China, Chile, Tunisia, Indonesia, Singapore, Morocco, Malaysia, Mauritius and India.

"Extreme poverty could be banished from the globe within one or two decades," Dr Jolly said. "More progress has been made in the last 50 years than in the previous 500."

Dr Jolly said that in developing countries overall, child mortality has been reduced by half. However, there are still 93 countries which, by the end of this year, are likely to have a per capita income below what it was between 10 and 40 years ago. And the gap between the poorest fifth of the world's population and the richest fifth increased from 30 to 1 in 1960 to 78 to 1 in 1994.

The report found wide degrees of income inequality both within and between countries. It also found that some of the world's poorest countries are cutting back on education spending — for years established as the most powerful tool to end poverty.

Finance, page 23

The Week

TIMOTHY McVeigh will be put to death by lethal injection for the Oklahoma City bombing, which killed 168 people, a jury in Colorado decided after two days of deliberation.
Washington Post, page 19

FORTY thousand illegal immigrants and political refugees are to get resident permits as the new Socialist-led French government moves to overturn anti-immigration measures taken by the Gaullist former interior minister Jean-Louis Debré.
Le Monde, page 17

ISRAELI soldiers shot and wounded at least 38 Palestinians in clashes with stone-throwing protesters in the West Bank town of Hebron.
Washington Post, page 19

THE Pentagon and a special White House panel have come under fire from the general accounting office, a congressional watchdog, for ruling out the possibility that Iraq resorted to using chemical or biological weapons during the Gulf war.

COLOMBIA'S main rebel group freed 70 soldiers who had been captured in combat and held for months, but there was no indication that the gesture would bring a lasting peace.

A FIRE during a sellout matinée screening at one of the grandest cinemas in the Indian capital, New Delhi, killed more than 60 people.

THE United Nations secretary-general, Kofi Annan, appointed the Irish president, Mary Robinson, the new High Commissioner for Human Rights.

THE last major town held by the Taliban in northeast Afghanistan, Pul-i-Khumri, fell to opposition forces, according to witnesses.

A US aid official said that Washington believed massacres were continuing in the Democratic Republic of Congo and urged its new leader, Laurent Kabila, Rwanda and Uganda to control their troops.

FOURTEEN Moroccans trying to enter Europe illegally drowned when their boat sank in the Mediterranean.

THE SOUTH African white supremacist Eugene Terre Blanche was sentenced to six years in jail for trying to murder one black man and assaulting another.

THE former Black Panther activist Elmer "Geronimo" Pratt was freed from prison, 27 years after he was jailed for murder in what many believe was a political frame-up.
Washington Post, page 20

Saddam's sons battle over succession

Peter Beaumont

SADDAM HUSSEIN'S sons have plunged into a family struggle over which of them should eventually succeed their 60-year-old father.

Iraq continues to flout the West's effort to prevent it from rearming by challenging United Nations inspections teams and using army helicopters to take pilgrims to Mecca through the "no-fly" zone. But behind the scenes Saddam's sons, Uday and Qusay, are locked in battle over who should occupy the number two position in the regime.

The struggle for supremacy follows warnings from Western diplomats that, rather than being weakened by the Gulf war five years ago, Saddam has reinforced his grip on Iraq and is as dangerous as ever.

He is claimed to have purged hundreds of political opponents in recent months after the attempt to kill Uday last December, when two unidentified gunmen sprayed Uday's car with automatic fire.

Until the assassination attempt, Uday, aged 33, was recognised as Saddam's heir-apparent. Last week, however, as Iraqi television pictured him hobbling on crutches out of the Ibn Sina hospital in Baghdad, opposition members were claiming that Qusay had usurped power.

The shooting has done more than lame Uday. It has left him politically crippled after years of terrorising Baghdad, and has punctured his image of invulnerability.

Watchers of Saddam's clan say that Qusay has moved quickly and taken over Uday's offices. Most important, they say, he has taken command of Saddam's paramilitary *fedayeen*.

The quiet coup has added to Qusay's already strong power base within Iraq — he runs Saddam's intelligence agencies, which are active again abroad, and the Presidential Guard. Few now believe Uday can claw back power.

Instead he may have to content himself with his media interests alone. Uday already owns the newspaper Babel. Last week he launched a new publication, al-Zawra, whose first issue — unusually — dealt with issues regarded as out of bounds under Iraq's strict press laws: criticising the country's ban on satellite dishes and restrictions on the Internet.

Uday's decline also marks a reshaping of the vicious politics of Saddam's clan. Saddam's wife, Sajida Talfah, is under house arrest, along with daughters Raghad and Rana. Less than a year ago, Saddam had his two sons-in-law, Hussein Kamel Hassan al-Majeed and Saddam Kamel Hassan al-Majeed, killed after they returned from Jordanian exile on promises of forgiveness for defecting, and Sajida's guarantee of their safety. One version says Uday and his allies were the trigger men.

But even in a family so bloody and treacherous, Uday has overstepped the mark. His career of rape and pillage has angered Saddam, threatening to overshadow his own Ba'ath party purges.

Uday's preying on Baghdad's young women and involvement with the black market brought unpopularity to Saddam's regime even from those who notionally depend on it. But Iraqi dissidents abroad say it is within the family that he has made his most serious enemies.

Saddam's half-brother, Watban Tikriti, once a powerful figure, lost a leg after being shot by Uday during an argument in 1995.

Salah Omar Ali, a member of the Iraqi National Accord Assembly, is one of many who believe Uday's power is in rapid decline. "He is disabled now and we understand that his brother Qusay is moving to take over his power. Uday cannot control things any more. He is seen now as being vulnerable and more a target for attack."

The wider significance of Qusay's rise in influence is in the succession to Saddam. According to Western analysts, Qusay — within the ghastly standards of his family — is regarded as less compromised than Uday. — *The Observer*

Baker seeks solution to Sahara row

Ian Black

UNITED NATIONS efforts to end one of the world's most intractable territorial disputes, over the Western Sahara moved to London last week in the hope that the United States' toughest diplomatic operator can cajole the parties into a deal.

James Baker, the former secretary of state, met the foreign ministers of Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania and the Polisario Front for two days of "proximity talks" to revive the long-dormant plans for a referendum on the former Spanish colony.

Mr Baker — now the United Nations special envoy on the Western Sahara issue — was said to be exploring how to end the impasse over giving Sahrawis a choice between independence and integration into Morocco.

Public pressure will be negligible: Moroccans of all political hues back King Hassan in demanding sovereignty over the barren but phosphate-rich territory, while Polisario is a one-party, exiled liberation movement with no military muscle and little international support.

The UN secretary-general, Kofi Annan, is impatient with the protracted dispute, although no blood has been shed since the 1991 ceasefire and a UN mission for the referendum, Minurso, was set up. But the conflict remains a source of regional instability while the Sahrawis live off international aid and in misery in southwestern Algeria, along with a few hundred Moroccan prisoners kept as bargaining chips.

Mr Baker's brief is to secure agreement on who should be eligible to vote in a referendum on the desert's future: just the 74,000 people included in the last Spanish census — held a year before the Moroccan takeover in 1975 — as favoured by Polisario, or the additional 120,000 Morocco says are of Saharan origin.

Despite Minurso's conciliation efforts, the sides have been unable to agree on procedures for identifying potential voters. The process was suspended a year ago, to suspicion that neither side really wanted to go ahead.

"Polisario has to give up its absolute insistence on independence," a Western diplomat said. And on the Moroccan side they will have to accept that Polisario will need a level of autonomy beyond what the Moroccans currently think is acceptable."

Polisario insists that the referendum must go ahead. "The only solution is to respect the principle of self determination," said the movement's UN representative, Bukhari Ahmed.

"This is a problem of decolonisation. Moroccan talk of a forgotten war is just intended to spread confusion in the international community."

Hope of a settlement rose last winter when King Hassan made a speech that was conciliatory towards Polisario, although he indicated that Saharan independence would not be discussed.

Muslim states join forces to challenge G7

Andrew Wood in Istanbul

LEADERS of eight of the world's biggest Muslim states, meeting in Istanbul last week, launched a new group for economic and political co-operation.

The organisation, called the Developing Eight, or D8, links Nigeria, Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia and Turkey.

It is seen as an Islamic counterweight to balance the G7 group plus Russia of industrialised democracies, which meets in Denver, Colorado this week.

Twenty years ago, a meeting of the D8 leaders would probably have agreed that the West had a moral obligation to give aid to promote economic development.

Now the talk is of globalisation and technology transfer. The declaration issued by the summit said the eight leaders recognised "the need for a stable macro-economic framework, and open markets".

Turkey has said other developing countries are welcome to join, whether or not they share an Islamic heritage, but the Malaysian prime minister, Mahathir Mohamad said the D8 shouldn't become too big, and must show results to be credible.

"If we fail, we should not make a pretence of being useful. We should fold up rather than hold meaningless meetings."

The D8 is an initiative of Turkey's first Islamist prime minister, Necmettin Erbakan, who is attempting to turn the country back towards its Muslim roots.

But the army, which guards the country's secular traditions, worries that Turkey is drifting towards fundamentalism under Mr Erbakan. Early elections have been called to try to resolve the crisis caused by the confrontation.

The D8 meeting might be the last appearance by Mr Erbakan on the world stage. He has now agreed to hand power over to his secular partner in the coalition government, Tansu Ciller, this week.



French troops escort expatriates to Brazzaville airport during an airlift of 6,000 foreigners last Sunday. Militias loyal to the former military leader of Congo Brazzaville, Dennis Sassou-Nguesso, later advanced on the airport, attacking troops loyal to President Pascal Lissouba PHOTOGRAPH: ERIC GAILLARD

Japan beaten in secret whale vote

Andrew Meldrum in Harare

IT WAS a case of win one, lose one for Japan last week at the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites) conference in Harare, Zimbabwe.

Japan won a vote to reject the establishment of a marine fish monitoring body and then lost one to separate Cites from the International Whaling Committee, which maintains a strict moratorium.

Participants and observers were unhappy that Japan managed to have both votes conducted by secret ballot. "It is a disastrous precedent that the first two important votes at this meeting went to a secret ballot," said Gordon Shepherd of the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF). "Secrecy was rarely used at previous Cites meetings. It is a blow for transparency."

Japan won support for secret ballots from countries that have received significant Japanese aid, according to observers. It was expected that this week's controversial votes on proposals to relax protection for elephants and rhinos will also be held in secret.

Japan and its backers quashed the proposal by the United States to establish a marine fish working group, which would have acted as a watchdog on commercial sea fishing. The ballot was won by 50 votes to 49.

"This vote effectively means marine fish conservation is off the Cites agenda until the next conference in two years' time," said Ginette Hemley, WWF's director of wildlife policy. "We're very unhappy about this."

On the other hand, environmental groups were pleased about the vote of a different committee, which rejected Japan's effort to separate Cites from the International Whaling Commission's ban on all commercial whaling. If Japan had won, it would have been a step towards lifting the whaling moratorium. Even by secret ballot, the vote was a decisive 51 to 27 against the Japanese. Japan and Norway were expected to be foiled in their attempts to relax restrictions on whaling this week.

"In their continuing desire to kill whales in defiance of world opinion, Japan and Norway seem willing to subvert long-held principles of transparency and compliance with international conventions," said Isabel McCrea, head of the Greenpeace delegation. "Whaling leads Norway and Japan into very murky waters indeed."

Meanwhile Zimbabwe shot itself in the foot at the conference, saying it would go ahead and sell elephant ivory, even if the conference voted to maintain the ivory trade ban.

"We will not accept it," the environment minister, Chen Chimutengwende, said. "Elephants are killing our people and destroying their own habitat. We have too many elephants and we must be able to earn some money from them."

Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia have mounted a convincing campaign to downlist the elephant from Cites Appendix 1 to Appendix 2, which would allow controlled sales of ivory.

Licence to kill, page 30

Immigrants at risk in racist Italy

John Hooper in Rome

IMMIGRANTS in Italy are being murdered at the rate of almost one every three days, a government minister has said. Figures compiled by university reseachers suggest that about two-thirds die in racial attacks.

Statistics from these two sources are the latest indication that Italian society may not be — as most Italians believe — less racist than others.

Speaking at the presentation last week of academic research into violent deaths of immigrants, the interior minister, Giorgio Napolitano, revealed that his figures were higher than those in the university study. He said they showed 111 foreigners from outside the European Union had died last year.

Prominent among Italy's varied immigrant population are its Filipino, Ethiopian and Dominican daily helps, its Albanian squeegee merchants, North African farmworkers and Sri Lankan street vendors. Mr Napolitano said Italians tended to think of immigrants "solely as perpetrators of crime and violence and not as victims".

But a study commissioned by the Italian Green party found the opposite to be true. Researchers monitored 20 national and regional newspapers to find out how many attacks on immigrants had been reported last year.

The result was a total of 374, of which 68 led to at least one death. Some attacks were not solely racially motivated, but sex attacks and violent robberies together accounted for less than a third of the total. The most frequent form of attack was by a group against a lone male.

None of this squares with the Italians' image of themselves as "xenophiles", rather than xenophobes. The number of legal residents of Italy born outside the EU had climbed to 943,000 by the end of last year — about 1.6 per cent of the total population. But many immigrants from the Third World have entered clandestinely. Estimates of the number of illegal residents range from 150,000 to 1 million.

Although Albanians caught entering Italy illegally are commonly repatriated, others are expelled only on paper. The tolerant attitude of successive Italian administrations has caused friction with EU partners at a time when the Union is striving to secure its frontiers.

But there is a growing feeling among Italian policy-makers of the left and centre that a "blind eye" approach could solve a serious, long-term problem. Italy has the world's lowest birth rate and one of the world's most generous pensions systems.

It faces the challenge of how to pay for growing numbers of elderly Italians out of the contributions from a working population that looks set to dwindle rapidly. The theory is that a sizeable population of immigrants, with a higher average birth-rate, could help to make good the shortfall.

Nazi remnants test Namibia's hate laws

Ruaridh Nicoll in Swakopmund

AMBASSADORS often arrive in their countries' former colonies to find a conservative expatriate community lying in wait for them. But for Hans Schumacher, Germany's man in Namibia, the problem is extreme.

Among those claiming a German heritage in what was once German Southwest Africa are some who still hold Hitler's values close to their hearts.

For the past few years, Dr Schumacher has done quiet battle with the old Nazis of Namibia. Now the issue has come to a head in a row over whether a newspaper advertisement commemorating the death of Rudolf Hess contravened the country's laws against inciting hatred. A supreme court ruling is imminent.

Dr Schumacher's battle with a small group of extremists began in 1994, when the embassy offered a free screening of the Oscar-winning film Schindler's List to children at Namibia's German schools.

The country's newspapers published about 250 letters, more than half of them expressing disgust with Dr Schumacher. "He is poisoning the souls of children," one said. His critics then published a full-page advertisement in the Windhoek Observer, calling Hess a "martyr for peace" and adding: "It was Jesus of Nazareth who died for Christianity and it was Rudolf Hess who died for Germany."

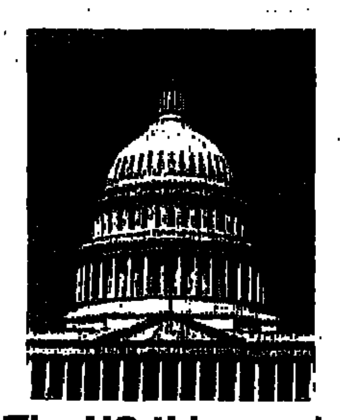
The government took the advertiser and the Observer's editor, Hannes Smith, to court for contravening the racial discrimination laws. A group of more than 30 German Namibians published an advertisement deploring the advertiser's views. The Jewish community, supported by the Dutch and German embassies, imported an exhibition dedicated to Anne Frank. The posters for the show were defaced and a group of revisionists turned up at a public forum and began denying the Holocaust.

Windhoek has its extremists, but the core of the far right is to be found elsewhere. In Swakopmund, not far from Kaiser Wilhelm Street, Peter Haller runs an antiques shop. Until a few years ago, he sold Nazi memorabilia. The memorabilia have disappeared, but the Imperial German war flag, a symbol of the neo-Nazi movement, remains.

"I have never spoken to the ambassador, and so I only know what people tell me," Mr Haller said. "They tell me he has come in and told the German community what to believe, what their attitude in life should be, and how to behave. People resent being told what to do by a youngster."

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Clinton stumbles over foreign affairs



The US this week

Martin Walker

PRESIDENT Bill Clinton put his foot down in Europe last week, bluntly informing his Nato allies that they would have only three new members this year — Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic — and that they should stop squabbling about the claims of Romania and Slovenia. Clinton was entitled to assert American leadership. Nato enlargement is his scheme, and the continued presence of United States troops in Bosnia testifies to his authority.

But even as we wait to see whether Clinton's gamble on China being cajoled and commercially seduced into decency will succeed, there are two important parts of US foreign policy that are not working well, and that are isolating Washington from its usual friends and natural partners. In each case, a touch of American arrogance is partly to blame.

Britain and other United Nations Security Council members reacted coldly last week to the agreement reached between the White House and the Republican-controlled Congress to repay US arrears to the UN, while also trying to secure a $500 million discount on its $1.3 billion debt. Under the deal reached with Senator Jesse Helms, chairman of the foreign relations committee, Washington would pay $819 million in back dues, but would also demand strict conditions on UN reform, and insist on reductions in the US's share of future UN costs.

"We have yet to see the details and the small print, but it appears that the US wants to cut its share of UN costs to 20 per cent, which would leave the EU [European Union] paying almost 40 per cent," a spokesman for the British delegation to the UN said. "This would raise some problems," he added with delicious understatement.

The US offer also includes set-offs for some of the logistics and communications services that it has provided to UN peace-keeping operations. Like Britain, the US has in the past not charged for these services, since they would usually be paid for in the defence budget. But Congress appears determined to cut its UN costs permanently, and is using the UN's need for Washington to pay its arrears as a hostage.

"We have a chance to get a real bipartisan package that will be acceptable to the UN," said the US ambassador to the UN, Bill Richardson, before British, French and other UN delegations had reacted. Indeed, the level of dismay at the UN and among other members appears barely to have been noticed in Washington, where Senator Joe Biden, the ranking Democrat on the foreign relations committee, hailed the deal as "a big breakthrough".

"This is going to be the most comprehensive UN reform package ever completed," said Helms's spokesman, Marc Thiessen, of what amounts to a unilateral US plan of downsizing and reforms to be imposed on the world body. The deal also includes Helms's extraordinary demand that, henceforth, the UN books be audited by the US government's general accounting office.

Helms is also the author of the infamous Helms-Burton Act, an unsavoury bit of bullying which says that foreigners who dare to trade with Cuba in defiance of the US embargo should be liable in American courts. This arrogant principle of the extra-territorial power of US law has also been extended to Iran, in support of Washington's policy of "dual containment" of Iraq and Iran.

This policy had one arguable justification, when Israel and the Palestinians seemed to reaching an historic peace settlement and meddlesome outsiders such as Iraq and Iran were best kept out of the way. But the peace process has stalled, the US is rinsing — if not washing — its hands and saying that the two sides should sort matters out themselves. And Iraq and Iran have each managed to rip some holes in the US blockade.

The photograph released by Iraq's information ministry last week of Saddam Hussein's son, Uday, walking on crutches and visibly recovering from last year's assassination attempt, has given a new edge to the deepening crisis of US policy in the Middle East, and the arguments between Washington and its Group of Eight partners over the collapsing American embargo. Even loyal Gulf allies say US policy has failed.

Even loyal allies in the Gulf say that US policy in the Middle East has failed

"The regime of Saddam Hussein is more strong than before, so America should find a way to reconsider," said Qatar's leader, Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa, after meeting Clinton in Washington last week.

American and other G8 officials are now trying to draft a common communiqué for their summit in Denver this week, which will skate over the row. The US is expected to merely repeat the vague expression of interest voiced by Clinton at the stunning presidential election victory of the "moderate" Mohammad Khatami in Iran, in return for its G8 partners muting their criticism of Washington's obduracy over Iraq.

But that outcome, which appears to be the goal of the national security council (NSC) officials trying to draft the G8 communiqué, depends on a continued state of precarious stability, if not outright stalemate, in Iraq. Bruce Riedel, the senior regional officer at the national security council in the White House, gave a formal policy speech this month to the Middle East Institute in which he said that the US was "committed to the policy of sanctions against Iraq for the long term", and that there could be no expectation of a policy change so long as Saddam Hussein remained in power.

GET A LOAD OF MR. TOLERANT...

The tone was a touch softer, but the policy was unchanged from the line devised by Martin Indyk, the new assistant secretary of state for the Middle East, when he held Riedel's job at the White House in 1993. Indyk then laid out the US goal: "to establish clearly and unequivocally that the current regime in Iraq is a criminal regime, beyond the pale of international society, and in our judgement irredeemable".

"America can live with a caged and weakened Saddam Hussein," says Richard Haass, former director of the Middle East section of the NSC during President Bush's administration and now in charge of foreign policy at the Brookings Institution. "The question is whether the cage is holding, with Iran helping smuggle Iraqi oil, and French and Russian business interests sniffing for deals."

The situation in Iraq is complicated by the way that Saddam's cage has expanded over the past year, with his deployment of troops to aid one Kurdish faction last summer restoring some measure of Iraqi control over what had been the no-fly zone of the north. And last month another part of Saddam's cage was ripped open when three brigades of Turkish troops backed by air power launched another incursion against the bases of Kurdish Workers' party (PKK) guerrillas inside northern Iraq.

The Turkish incursion alarmed Syria, which has its own Kurdish minority in the north, and Damascus responded by relaxing its traditional animosity to Iraq and reopening three crossing points on what had been a closed border. For Saddam, this meant that even the humiliation of seeing Iraqi territory invaded by the Turks at least had the merit of prising open some more bars of his cage.

After the demonisation of Saddam during the Gulf war, it appears politically impossible to change US policy, whatever European and Japanese allies or the Turks may say, or however many of America's friends in the Gulf send "get-well" delegations to Uday's bedside.

Moreover, having defined the essence of US foreign policy as "the expansion of democracy", Clinton must now address the verdict of democracy in Iran, where 91 per cent of the population turned out to give 69 per cent of its vote to the moderate reform candidate, Khatami. So far, the US has barely noticed.

"It is hard to make a judgement when the guy is not yet in office," a White House official, who preferred to remain anonymous, told the Guardian. "We are in a watch-and-wait mode. Our concerns about Iran's international behaviour — from support for terrorism to nuclear proliferation to Gulf security — are still out there."

Is the US prepared to be more forthcoming if the right kind of signals come from Iran, or from the noises Washington's allies are now making in Tehran? "I didn't say that. I carefully didn't say that," the official replied. "But I hope we can reach a common position on Iran with our G7, or rather, G8 allies at the Denver summit."

The US foreign policy establishment also now accepts that dual containment has failed. Even before the Iranian election, two former White House national security advisers, Zbigniew Bzrezinski (a Democrat) and Brent Scowcroft (Republican), published a joint call in the journal Foreign Affairs for "using carrots in addition to sticks in getting Iran to shift course".

'We are the leader of the free world, so the rest of the world had better fall into step'

"Extraterritorial bullying has generated needless friction between the US and its chief allies and threatened the international free trade order," they warned. "The strident US campaign to isolate Iran drives Iran and Russia closer and the US and its G7 allies apart."

Clinton has domestic problems with softening his line on Iran, which give him little political cover for any change of approach. The inquiry into the bombing of the Khobar Towers barracks in Saudi Arabia, which killed 19 US troops, is still under way. Iranian complicity in the attack is suspected. In Congress the foreign relations committee chairman, Helms, and the Banking Committee chairman, Senator Alfonse D'Amato, support the use of US laws to punish foreigners who invest in Iranian oil.

Clinton must also consider America's powerful pro-Israel lobby, his political debt to it, and his closeness to Israel's former prime minister, Shimon Peres, whose last speech in Washington stressed that "Iran is the greatest threat and the greatest problem in the Middle East". Indeed, Clinton chose the forum of the World Jewish Congress in New York in 1995 to announce his total ban on "all trade with an all investment in Iran", and the suspension of "nearly all other economic activity between our nations".

G8 pressure, the fact that Russia is openly selling arms and nuclear technology to Iran despite US displeasure, and Turkey's $23 billion natural gas development project with Tehran have combined with recent events in Iran to put a policy review on the US agenda.

"When President Clinton called the Iranian elections 'interesting', he at least opened the possibility of a new dialogue, but it is clear that the basic US policy conditions for that dialogue are unchanged," said Anthony Cordesman, director of Middle Eastern studies at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). "Congress will be very hard to shift on this issue, and American public opinion still remembers Iran as the place that took our diplomats hostage and then took out a contract on Salman Rushdie."

Moreover the US, with its economic and military self-confidence, is not inclined to pay too much attention to the bleatings of allies intent on winning fat contracts.

"We are supposed to be the leader of the free world, so the rest of the world had better fall into step here," said William Taylor, director of political-military studies at CSIS. "If something new comes out of the new Iranian president's office, we'll look at it. But the returns aren't in on this guy yet, and he'll be under the Revolutionary Council's thumb."

Inside the White House, there is a mixture of hope and expectation that Khatami will make some public statement or gesture that will melt some of the permanent frost, preferably backed by a visible reform that catches public attention in the US, whether an easing of women's rights or a lifting of the fatwa on Rushdie. But for now, the US is in a policy trap, and needs the help of Iran, or its G8 partners, to wriggle out.

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Armenians carve up Azeri regions

James Meek in Lachin

ANMA stood among the high buildings overlooking the half-broken houses sprawling towards the valley floor thousands of metres below and savoured the spoils of a great and terrible victory. The sound of hammering and bulldozers rose in the air.

"We've got everything we need, and what we don't have, we will," she said, a 35-year-old mother whose shy smile, dyed blond hair and smart red dress veiled the struggle of years as a refugee and now a settler on Armenia's new frontier. "There are schools, a music school, a sports complex, free electricity and plenty of work. There's building going on everywhere. It wasn't so easy to begin with but now everything's fine."

But everything is not fine. A new West Bank is in the making in the Caucasus as an Armenian land rush gets under way in territories seized by force from their ancient blood enemies, the Turkic Azeris.

Three years after the war for the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave ended in total victory for its ethnic Armenian inhabitants, thousands of the homes from which an estimated 500,000 Azeris were driven are being taken over by the victors.

Representatives of the main peace-talks sponsors — Washington, Paris and Moscow — are now touring the region with new proposals, and struggling against the tide of Armenians flowing into the ethnically cleansed Azeri regions.

The foreign minister of the unrecognised Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, Arkady Goukassian, said its officials were neither helping nor blocking the takeover of former Azeri homes and farms. Most of the Armenians had been driven from Azerbaijan by the threat of pogroms before the war began, he said.

"If the state is in no condition to provide these people with homes, they look for a way out by themselves. The process is spontaneous ... We and Azerbaijan have to hurry to settle this conflict, since the more Armenians who settle there, the more difficult it'll become."

After taking over most of Karabakh, the local Armenians, backed by Armenia proper, overran seven surrounding districts, brutally driving hundreds of thousands of Azeris and Kurds from their homes before looting and burning them to create a buffer between themselves and the rest of Azerbaijan. It is into this dereliction that Armenians are now moving to live.

Most of them have moved into Lachin, the district linking Karabakh with Armenia. But Mr Goukassian acknowledged that settlers have also been trickling into Kelbajar, from where 60,000 Azeris and Kurds were expelled over high mountains in winter by an Armenian offensive in 1993. An aid worker in the Karabakh capital Stepanakert, said he had seen newly planted crops ripening in fields in Agdam, a district to the east cleared of Azeris and devastated by Armenia.

Mr Goukassian compared it to an American goldrush. "As people move in, they choose their own judge, their own sheriff and so on. Perhaps the same kind of thing is going on in these villages."

Lachin already has its own mayor, Sarnis Akopian, an Armenian refugee from another part of Azerbaijan who led the move back to the district in 1994. He admitted that 10 years earlier, 14,000 Azeris lived there. They have all been driven out. In their place are 7,500 Armenians: by the end of the century the plan is to have four times as many, moved in from Armenian refugee camps.

"If someone doesn't have the means to move here, we can help," Mr Akopian said. "They write to us and we do all we can to transport their goods here and repair a home. When we came here in 1994, there were roofs on only eight houses. Now there are 700 homes with roofs.

"We need to live in this town. There's no room in Armenia, there's no room in Nagorno-Karabakh. They chased us out of Azerbaijan. Where are we supposed to live? The moon? If we have too many people here, we'll have to expand. We'll settle as many people as there are liberated lands."

Lachin lies high on the slopes of the green valley of the river Akera, flanked by steep peaks and ridges rising to 2,500m and so sharply folded they look freshly formed by the clash of continents. Under the gaze of the eagles that cruise the thermals, engineers are frantically working to finish the building of a Western-standard road, funded largely by the Armenian diaspora, which will secure the link between Armenia proper, Nagorno-Karabakh and the lands between.

Armenians repair the war-damaged roof of the market in Lachin, formerly an Azeri town



The Armenians, who converted to Christianity even before the Romans, yield little to the Israelis in reaching back to the past to prove their historic entitlement to this or that territory. They point to around 50 Armenian churches in Lachin district, one dating from the fourth century, to make their point.

They justify their deeds by reference to past Azeri and Turkish attacks on them, from the Turkish genocide at the beginning of the century to the Sumgait massacre in 1990.

In Shusha, in Karabakh, another town that had a largely Azeri population, Armenians say the two ancient mosques are "Persian work" Asked how many people lived there before the war, the mayor, Mels Akopjanian, said: "I don't know."

Here, too, incoming and returning Armenians are busy roofing and painting the scorched flats and half-ruined homes left by the fighting. Gravestones in the Azeri cemetery have been methodically smashed and vandalised.

Svetlana Vartanova, an Armenian from Ashkhabad in Central Asia who came to Shusha with her family in 1995, said it did not trouble her to live in a house that had belonged to an Azeri family. "I didn't know them. And I can't sympathise with them because of what they did to my people."

Sonia Gandhi's silence speaks volumes

Suzanne Goldenberg in Amethi

AT A PETROL pump on a lonely road in northern India, an unknown author applies the final touches to his labour of love, a thousand-page biography, Moun Bolta Hai: Silence Speaks, that he is paying to publish himself.

The subject of the work, Sonia Gandhi, has been India's most celebrated cipher for six years. From her sprawling white bungalow on a tree-lined avenue in New Delhi, she has exercised a fascination for Indians that is without parallel, simply by refusing to answer one question: Will she or won't she enter politics?

Until last month, it was almost unthinkable that the Italian-born, 50-year-old widow of the murdered former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi would play a formal role in the Congress party that, since independence in 1947, has seemed inseparable from her husband's family.

But despite her silence, Sonia's hold on the hearts of men such as Jagdish Piyush, who appointed himself her biographer, is absolute. "She speaks little, but her heart is full of emotion," he said. "In India, women don't talk much. If Sonia is silent, that means she is doing politics."

As Rajiv's widow, Sonia wields enormous influence within the party and beyond. Her home is a regular point of pilgrimage for the politically ambitious and those seeking to tap the resources of the family's charitable trusts under her control.

She is, however, famously reserved, having given her last interview to a Hindi-language magazine in 1985, and known for rearranging the seating at public functions to avoid photographers.

She has good reason to fear Indian political life. Her husband was blown up by a Tamil suicide bomber on the election trail in 1991, and her mother-in-law, Indira, died in her arms after being gunned down by her Sikh bodyguard in 1984.

When the Congress announced last month that she had become a party member, the dozens of politicians who call on her each day had a new spring in their steps. After facing its most humiliating defeat since independence in last year's elections, the party could almost smell salvation. But cynics note that her brush with official politics coincides with the reopening of investigations into the alleged payment of kickbacks in a Swedish arms deal. The press has linked her husband's name to the affair.

For the urban élite, who have enjoyed six years of economic liberalisation under prime ministers not drawn from the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, Sonia is little more than an entertaining sideshow. But congressmen take her more seriously. Billboards bearing her image have sprouted throughout the capital, and in the run-up to last week's elections for a Congress party president, the contenders offered to stand down if she led the party.

She did not jump into the fray, but the revival of a dynastic myth is still viewed as a welcome diversion from the corruption scandals and infighting with which the Congress has been more recently associated — a sad departure from the earlier, heroic independence era.

"She will be a crowd-puller if nothing else. Otherwise our performance has been miserable," said V N Gadgil, the party spokesman. "Even if she doesn't stand for office, she will encourage and enthuse the rank and file. And if she does that without accepting office, it will have a greater impact. If she can say, 'I am doing all this while expecting nothing in return' people will respect her more."

In Rajiv's former stronghold of Amethi, the prospect of Sonia entering politics has an almost mystical appeal. "When Sonia comes, everything will be fine," said Ram Harsh Singh, the local Congress member of the state legislature. "This is not only true of Amethi, but of all of India."

It is a view widely shared. "We all want her to enter politics because only that will fill the gap," said Anand Prakash Mishra, a party worker for 45 years from the town of Musafirkhana. "Now the Congress party has not got such a strong leader, it can be called at this time a leaderless party. So many camps and so many leaders are fighting with each other and only doing their own work."

Dynasties, like empires, seldom go quietly. The Nehru-Gandhi dynasty spans five generations, beginning with Motilal Nehru, a president of the Indian National Congress during the struggle against British rule.

The next three generations — Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv — all served as prime ministers. Though Indira and Rajiv's reigns corresponded with the moral decline in Indian public life that is so lamented today, they have been spared much of the blame because both were felled by assassins.

Rajiv's newly married daughter, Priyanka, is already the subject of political speculation. Her brother Rahul has escaped by studying abroad.

Sonia's silence, while discomfiting for opponents of the Congress unable to gauge her intentions, has a dual purpose: it keeps the Gandhi mystique alive and strengthens the argument of those who say she has adopted the important traditional virtue of Indian womanhood. But some say the residual allure of India's first family is fading, overtaken by a less patrician sort of hero with whom lower-caste and Dalit (formerly Untouchable) Indians can identify.

"The dynasty thing is not appreciated now by most of the common people. Today, they feel that the majority should rule and that there should be real democracy and social justice," said Sanjay Singh, son of the late Rajah of Amethi.

The Hindu right has also tried to damage her image, attacking her for delaying taking out Indian citizenship for a decade after her marriage. But that has had little effect in the northern heartland. "Foreigners have always come and gone. They come here to work for us and for India. She is now Indian," said Northi Das, a farmer in Benipur village.

Others are less certain. "What tremendous thing she can do for the Congress is not so clear," said Ram Akbar Bahadur Srivastava. "There is no poverty in her country, so how can she understand us?"

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Regime under threat from all sides

David Hirst

IN APRIL, President Omar Bashir and five southern leaders signed a so-called "peace from within" in the grounds of the presidential palace. It was a remarkably relaxed, informal, "popular" occasion, out of keeping somehow with this Nile-side edifice — an immaculate, white-painted, stately relic of 19th century British colonialism where General Gordon was speared to death and beheaded by the victorious troops of an earlier Islamic revival.

Under trees that the British planted, now majestically full-grown but still bearing labels that testify to their Indian origin, turbaned Arabs and Muslims of the north mingled with African southerners — Dinkas, Shilluks and Nuers — all with their distinguishing tribal scars.

A banner proclaimed that "Coexistence of religions is the spirit of peace", and every time a speaker said anything of note, the northerners' shouts of "God is great" were answered by the "hallelujas" of the southerners.

If it was not really as joyous as it seemed, it was a most extraordinary event, the greatest single measure of the pragmatism and expediency of which a very ideological Islamist regime is capable. "What Turabi did would have been a crime, high treason, even two years ago," said an astonished southerner. For no one had been more zealous than the ruling National Islamic Front (NIF) and its idealogue, Hassan al-Turabi, in pushing for war, for the overt or surreptitious Arabisation and Islamisation of the south, before it came to power, or in prosecuting it after it did.

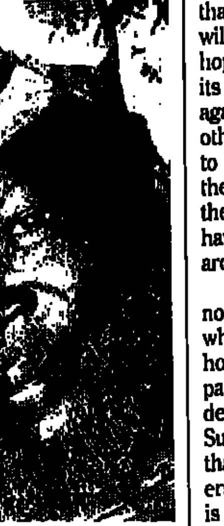
Now, suddenly, it offers the southerners the "self-determination" and other key concessions they have been seeking for 40 years. In a referendum to be held in four years' time, they will be free to decide whether to remain in a united Sudan or secede from it.

Strength or weakness on the NIF's part? Strength, certainly, in the sense that, as the most entrenched of regimes, it can do as it sees fit. Weakness, however, in the sense that, for all its internal cohesion, it faces an ever-growing array of problems, local, regional and international, which are inherently linked in its mind as elements of an American-led "conspiracy" to bring it down.

The war, thus externally backed and open-ended, has become a colossal, continuous drain on the resources and stamina of the northerners. At first, thanks largely to the collapse of the Mengistu regime in Ethiopia, the NIF managed to reconquer almost the whole of the south from John Garang and his Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). But lately he has staged a remarkable recovery, and, after taking a string of towns, he is preparing for an assault on Juba, the southern "capital".

The war has produced an evolution in northern thinking, a turning away from military solutions. The regime is all the more susceptible to such thinking in that, some believe, it would be quite ready for the ultimate pragmatism — to let the south go, if that is the price to preserve the north, Islamically pure, under its control.

But there is a new, more formidable, northern opposition, too, whose tactics mirror those of the regime. Whereas, with promises of possible secession, Dr Turabi has allied himself with a group of southern rebels in his determination to preserve the existing order in Khartoum, this northern opposition has joined forces with another group of southerners in order to change it.



Garang: main power-broker

It has formed the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), headquartered in Asmara, Eritrea. The two great traditionalist parties, the Umma and the Khatimiyah, plus some "modern" forces, including communists and army officers, represent the northern component of this coalition.

The traditionalists carry weight in their own right, but it is in their choice of southern allies that they really score. Mr Garang and the SPLA, the backbone of southern rebellion, add up to far more than the five breakaway groups that the regime has mustered. To Mr Garang's southerners should be added the so-called "marginalised" peoples, neither wholly Arab nor African, who see in the southern struggle, and now the NDA, a vehicle for their own increasingly assertive purposes. They and the southerners probably represent a good 60 per cent of the population. They include the Nuba mountain tribesmen of the west and the Beja tribesmen in strategic territory along the Red Sea coast.

MR GARANG and the northerners do not trust each other, for their ultimate aims are too divergent, but it is a reflection of his political importance and his military potentialities that they have accepted him as commander of the NDA militia.

The plan is to exert military pressure at as many points as possible in both south and north, forcing the regime to disperse its already overstretched military resources. When the time is ripe, the opposition will stage a popular insurrection to which the army will rally.

With the help of the far more numerous southerners, the northern rebel troops have opened new fronts just inside the north, from Ethiopian and Eritrean territory. Along the Ethiopian border the Funj, one of the "marginalised" peoples, have fought their way close to the dam, that supplies 80 per cent of Khartoum's electricity.

With the help of another such group, the Bejas, the opposition hopes to move on Port Sudan. "We shall start the job from outside and the people will finish the job from inside," said General Abdul Rahman Said, an NDA commander in Cairo.

It is the NIF's fond hope that its "peace from within" will undermine popular support for Mr Garang, or that its five southern accomplices will wage effective war on him. The hope is probably vain. For one thing, its own essential nature militates against it. Dr Turabi urges respect of other religions, but he seems unable to discipline his zealots, to prevent them from bulldozing yet more of the churches that southern refugees have erected in the shanty towns around the capital.

For another thing, Mr Garang is not going to sign an agreement to which he was not an original party, however favourable it might be on paper, and he is still officially wedded to the preservation of a united Sudan, and to a strategy which says that the only way for the southerners to secure their rightful place in it is to replace the NIF theocracy with a pluralist democracy.

He is already Sudan's main power-broker, a position he could exploit, if necessary, as much against his own northern allies as against their common enemy in Khartoum. It is doubtful whether the traditionalist northern parties really have the means to stage an uprising against so harsh and tyrannical a regime.

They have lost much of their popular following, and they can no longer command much support among what is left of the "modern forces" — notably trade unions and professional associations — that have played a key role in changes of regime in the past. Yet an uprising, or, better still, a clean-cut military *putsch* on their behalf, is what they badly need if they are to keep Khartoum in safe northern Muslim hands and preserve a real bargaining power in their dealings with Mr Garang.

The longer such an outcome is delayed, the greater becomes the momentum for the "military alternative", with its eventual "march on the capital". That is something the two traditionalist dinosaurs greatly fear. For it would make Mr Garang more powerful than ever, turning him into a "saviour".

Then he could do more than merely ensure that his northern allies keep their promises about the south. He could probably confront them with a stark choice: southern secession or the preservation of a united Sudan, but only at the price of a fundamental historic change in its whole internal balance of power, reversing the dominance of the Arab Muslim north over the African south. That prospect is all the more plausible if, among the Africans, one counts all those "marginalised" peoples who have joined the fray.

Beyond that, there is the danger of complete disintegration, Somali-style. "We could reach a point where there are just too many armies in the field," said one opposition leader. That would have disruptive consequences beyond Sudan's nine international frontiers.

Dr Turabi speaks darkly about stepping up his interference in his neighbours' affairs. He tells foreign journalists that if he unleashed the thousands of Eritrean dissidents he is currently holding back, "that would burn Africa".

Casting to the winds official caution about not "exporting revolution", the loyalist newspaper al-Alwan recently said Sudan had "gained nothing from its moderation", and should turn itself into a truly "extremist, fundamentalist state".

Small wonder that the Arab and Muslim world, led by an Egypt deeply worried about its stake in the waters of the Nile, does not know what to do about the growing threat to the integrity of yet another Arab state, whether it is better to preserve in power a deeply repugnant regime or to support an opposition which, in destroying that regime, might destroy the whole country, too.

The Week In Britain James Lewis

Government plans to boost skills in 'three Rs'

TEACHERS in primary schools may be required to devote an hour each day to reading and writing. The "literacy hour" is the latest in a flurry of educational initiatives by the new Government to improve performance in the "three Rs" — reading, writing and arithmetic.

Estelle Morris, a junior education minister, said the Government was not harking back to "some mythical elementary golden age", but English and maths needed to be given a sharper focus in the school timetable if pupils were to attain the ambitious targets for improved performance at the age of 11.

Teacher training courses would be adapted to reinforce the most effective techniques — including the phonics approach — for improving reading. Ms Morris said she also wanted to see more whole-class interactive teaching in maths, a subject in which, according to another international study, standards in England and Scotland are also falling behind those of competitor nations. But she did not call for a daily "numeracy hour".

Teachers say they cannot devote more time to the three Rs unless there is a cut in the 10-subject national curriculum imposed on the profession by the last government. But Ms Morris said there would be no overhaul of the curriculum. The school standards body, Ofsted, is satisfied that good schools can deliver all subjects in the curriculum without skimping on the basics.

Jim Campbell, a professor of education at Warwick University, argued that extra time for arithmetic could be found by lengthening the school day. This is another idea the Government is reported to be considering, since the school week in Britain is shorter than in many other comparable countries.

When the privately educated Prince of Wales, in a TV interview, voiced his concerns about falling standards and advised a return to traditional teaching methods, he was condemned by teaching unions. Doug McAvoy, of the National Union of Teachers, said the underachieving youngsters for whom the Prince was concerned were the products "not of a failed education system but of a failed society".

Nigel de Gruchy, of the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers, said the prince was abusing his position by involving himself in education. But the school standards minister, Stephen Byers, thought it would be regrettable if a potential future monarch were to ignore the subject: "Education is not some sort of secret garden around which only trade union secretaries can comment."

Dangerous game, page 14

THREE former BBC managing directors accused the director-general, John Birt, of being a "wrecker" who had dismantled the World Service. They urged the Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, and the National Heritage Secretary, Chris Smith, to reverse changes to the service, which was integrated into the domestic BBC last year.

John Tusa, managing director of the World Service for six years until 1992, said it was a Thatcherite blueprint that had robbed the service of its special and distinctive place in a federal BBC. The speed with which the structuring had been carried out was the work of "a wrecker anxious not to be thwarted".

THE FUTURE of two boys convicted of murdering Merseyside toddler James Bulger was placed in the hands of the new Home Secretary, Jack Straw, when the House of Lords ruled that his predecessor, Michael Howard, had acted illegally in imposing an inflexible 15-year minimum sentence.

Judges at the trial of Robert Thompson and Jon Venables, who were both aged 10 at the time of the murder, had suggested a sentence of eight years. The Law Lords ruled that juveniles should be treated differently from adult lifers, and their progress towards rehabilitation should be reviewed regularly, with a view to their release.

Mr Howard had also acted illegally and unfairly in taking account of a petition, organised by a tabloid newspaper, calling for the two boys to be put away for life.

THE POPULAR novelist Dame Catherine Cookson — now frail, bedridden and almost blind — was so outraged by Newcastle university's decision to close its internationally renowned Hatton art gallery that she wrote a £50,000 cheque to keep it open and promised similar annual sums for the next five years.

The money will replace the university's withdrawn £40,000 funding of the gallery, which houses paintings by Goya and Bacon and 12 tons of Dadaist art. Dame Catherine, who is 90 this year, had until recently written a book a year since 1950, and has provided steady funding to the university.

WITH less than 1,000 days to go to the Millennium, the plan to build a £580 million dome at Greenwich was put on hold while ministers take yet another look at the project, dogged by controversy since it was dreamt up last year. A final decision will be made by the full Cabinet.

The dome — "an odyssey into the future" according to its designer, Lord (Richard) Rogers — is supposed to be the hub of the Millennium Exhibition. But nobody can decide what it should house.



Tunnel protest collapses

David Ward

THE four-week siege of six protest camps on the site of Manchester Airport's planned second runway ended on Monday with its only real moment of drama when the last protester and a tunneller sent to dig him out were trapped as a tunnel wall collapsed.

Matt Benson had spent 408 hours and 14 minutes in the Cakehole tunnel at the Flywood camp by the time he was brought to the surface. He was immediately arrested and, supported by a digger, walked groggily to a police van.

His achievement easily broke the record set by his three Cakehole colleagues, Neville, Muppet Dave and Denise, who emerged voluntarily last week. They in turn had beaten the record (just under seven days) set by Swampy (Daniel Hooper) at the A30 evictions in Devon.

For his last five hours underground, Matt, a former NHS administrator with a scarlet mohican, crouched with the professional tunneller on the wrong side of the wall collapse, 15ft into the tunnel and 30ft below ground.

They had spent the time "discussing their predicament", according to Randal Hibbert, the under-sheriff of Cheshire whose task, known as Operation Fulcrum, is now complete.

Mr Hibbert said the tunnel, which he described as "an engineering feat", had been shored up by the protesters during four months of construction but gave way possibly as the result of water penetration following heavy rain.

Five of the sheriff's men went into the tunnel to strengthen the shoring and dig away the debris. The rescuers maintained intercom contact and the air supply throughout the operation, and passed food and drink through a section of tunnel left open.

Describing the event as a rescue but not an emergency, Mr Hibbert said he had warned protesters that it was only a matter of time before "some sort of incident occurred".

"It was very fortunate that it was not more serious," he added.


Benson in the tunnel where he spent 408 hours PHOTO: ANITA HUMMEL

Stiffer rules on live exports

Paul Brown

RULES governing the live export of animals from Britain are to be tightened up, along with the provision of wider powers to withdraw licences from carriers who break the rules.

The standards, announced by the Government last week, should have been introduced in January by the previous government to conform with European Union policy. They fall far short of measures the animal rights lobby would like. But Elliot Morley, the agriculture minister, said there would be a review in a year's time.

The unlicensed journey time for animals is now set at eight hours, after which they must be unloaded and rested for 24 hours. If the operator is licensed and the vehicle meets additional standards, adult cattle, sheep and goats may travel 14 hours before a minimum rest of one hour, followed by a further 14 hours.

Pigs may travel up to 24 hours, provided they are given water throughout the journey. This last regulation has brought a different kind of dispute with the EU. Prize breeding sows exported live are worth £90 million to the British economy, but a main selling point is that they are disease free. Unloading them would risk contamination.

Jack Cunningham, the agriculture minister, said that the pigs were exported in luxury trucks, known as Pullmans, and the animals would not suffer if the vehicle were stopped for 24 hours rather than being unloaded.

Labour denies Tube 'sale'

Rebecca Smithers

THE Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, on Monday rejected accusations of hypocrisy over Labour's plans to invite private investment in London's Tube, insisting the Government was against "wholesale privatisation".

Mr Prescott, who is also Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, was at the centre of a row after BBC TV's Panorama programme disclosed details of a confidential document showing the Government was considering some form of privatisation for the cash-strapped network.

But Mr Prescott claimed that the BBC had "stolen" the papers, while insisting his party's policy had not changed since it was elected. He admitted the Government was looking at ways of bringing in the private sector to improve services, which might involve "public-private partnerships", possibly along the lines of British Rail privatisation, with separation of control of infrastructure and services.

Other options included setting up a trust to guide investment, or modifying Treasury rules to enable modernisation to go ahead. He emphasised that, unlike the Tories' sell-off plans, published before the election as a supposed "vote-winner", Labour's blueprint would contain some government control.

He insisted: "We have rejected totally the idea the Tories put forward for the Underground, which was to totally privatise it and hope they would do the investment."

But Opposition MPs claimed a "Labour U-turn". Sir George Young, the shadow transport spokesman, said: "John Prescott may complain about stolen documents, but he's the one who has 'borrowed' my proposals . . . His bid for extra public money has clearly been rejected".

No honours for MPs

Michael White

DAVID HOCKNEY and Nick Park, creator of Wallace and Gromit, are among the recipients of the Queen's Birthday Honours on a 980-name list that includes business tycoons and heroic teachers — but no time-serving politicians.

The 317 women in the 1997 list include jazz singer Cleo Laine, who becomes a Dame, and Victoria Wood OBE. Fashion designer Zandra Rhodes and Kamlesh Bahl, chairwoman of the Equal Opportunities Commission, become CBEs.

Playwright Tom Stoppard becomes Sir Tom and Donald Sinden becomes a knight. Mr Hockney, is made Companion of Honour. Gallantry awards went to Philip Lawrence, the murdered London headteacher, three Dunblane teachers and Lisa Potts, the nursery nurse who prevented a massacre in Wolverhampton.

Conservative MPs fumed quietly when they learned that Tony Blair had made good his pledge to curb political honours by rejecting John Major's proposals for nearly 50 peers, knights, dames and MBEs for those who grease the wheels. "An act of utter vindictiveness, typically shitty," said one Tory MP.

Mr Blair accepted the list prepared for Mr Major, but rejected all 40 to 50 names on the political list.

Chemical leak forces ICI to shut plant

Peter Hetherington

WHEN the dense white cloud drifted over northern Teesside, people started coughing and wheezing before police warned them to stay indoors.

In the fields beside Greatham, a farmworker went bright red and started spluttering, and a woman dependent on a kidney dialysis machine needed emergency treatment. Others complained of feeling unwell.

Two weeks after a leak of the potentially dangerous chemical titanium tetrachloride, part of the ICI-owned Tioxide plant, near Hartlepool, Cleveland, remains closed on Environment Agency orders.

By taking the unusual step of serving a prohibition notice under the Environmental Protection Act — after slapping less severe enforcement notices on Tioxide following a string of leaks — the agency is signalling a tougher approach against the chemical giant.

Its senior officials are alarmed that the latest Tioxide escape came shortly after a meeting with ICI nationally, at which the company agreed to improve the management of plants in an attempt to prevent further serious incidents.

Concern was heightened hours afterwards when oil leaked into the Tees from a sister ICI plant at Wilton, prompting the agency's operations director, Archie Robertson, to say: "It is outrageous that within weeks of ICI being called to a meeting with the agency where it promised to clean up its act that its plants have been involved in two further leaks."

Tioxide, part of a huge ICI operation on Teesside, makes titanium dioxide, a white powder pigment used in paint, plastics and paper. Councillors complained last month when 20 gallons escaped from the plant, creating a dense white cloud. Then came a bigger leak two weeks later, when water apparently seap into a cooling circuit.

On Teesside, which contains one of Europe's largest chemical complexes, doctors often report a high level of respiratory ailments. Some schools are concerned about the level of asthma among pupils.

A 1995 study by Newcastle university's department of epidemiology and public health found that women living beside one ICI plant were four times more likely to contract lung cancer than the national average.

By rebuking ICI, the agency appears determined to show it means business after a series of incidents in the North over the past year.

Next month, a special agency team is due to complete a review of management systems at ICI Runcorn, while officials at Teesside monitor progress at Tioxide.

ICI disputes the claims that its plants pose a health hazard. As a responsible employer, it says, it is in contact with community groups to inform them of its plans. Although escaping chemicals sometimes created a dense cloud, the misty conditions made a leak appear worse.

A Tioxide spokesman, Bill Beattie, insisted they were updating and improving the plant regardless of the Environment Agency. The affected section would be reopened when it was operating effectively and safely, he said.

MPs vote to ban handguns

Rebecca Smithers

THE Commons voted overwhelmingly last week in favour of legislation that will lead to a ban on all handguns, despite strong opposition from the Tories and a handful of Labour rebels who failed to push through a wrecking amendment.

In a free vote, MPs defeated by 384 votes to 173 an amendment tabled by John Major designed to delay the legislation. The Firearms (Amendment) Bill then received its second reading by 384 votes to 181 — a Government majority of 203. Ministers hope it will become law next month.

It goes much further than the law introduced after the Dunblane massacre, which banned all large-calibre handguns but not the .22-calibre.

Six Labour MPs voted against the bill's second reading, while others abstained. The Labour rebels were Frank Cook, MP for Stockton North, Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby), Kate Hoey (Vauxhall), Harry Barnes (Derbyshire NE), Jamie Cann (Ipswich) and Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre). No Tory MP voted for the bill.

The chairwoman of the Gun Control Network, Gill Marshall-Andrews, said: "Of course we are very pleased, but we want to see how it will be implemented, how the guns will be disposed of."

But others said the ban did not address the real issues of crime prevention. Michael Yardley, national spokesman for the Sportsmans' Society, said the bill was simplistic, adding that it "will not prevent future tragedy".

Opening the debate, the Home Secretary, Jack Straw, stressed the need for balance. "I recognise there will be law-abiding shooters who will be inconvenienced, and I regret that, but I am in no doubt where the balance should be struck between the right to practise sport and the right to life — particularly the right to life of a child."

The shadow home secretary, Michael Howard, said: "The proposals in this bill are unnecessary, unfair and expensive."

Anne McGuire, Labour MP for Stirling, which includes Dunblane, said the restrictions brought in by the previous administration had left a "lethal loophole".

She told MPs it was important to remember the original reason for the debate. "Thomas Hamilton went into a primary school in Dunblane with four high-calibre guns . . . killed 16 children and their teacher and injured 15 more. Only eight years before, we saw a similar incident in the town of Hungerford. We . . . are criticised for bringing an emotional element to the gun debate, but it's the emotional element that makes us different from other species."

In Brief

THE register of suspected or convicted paedophiles held on confidential police records has more than doubled in size in two years, to 25,000, in part because of the sharp increase in police activity to combat child pornography and sex tourism.

BOBBY BATES, one of the notorious Shankill Butchers, was murdered in an attack that may be connected to a loyalist feud that goes back 20 years.

SENIOR Conservatives in Scotland have announced that the party will back the campaign against devolution in the forthcoming referendum.

LABOUR wants to change its rules so that Mohammed Sarwar, the Glasgow Govan MP accused of bribery, can be suspended from the party without prejudging the case against him. He was harshly criticised in an internal party inquiry for conduct "unbecoming and totally inappropriate for a Labour MP".

GEORGE CONDON, aged 68, is to become the first person in Britain to claim compensation from an employer for being unfairly retired. The over-65s have no protection under English law, but his lawyers will argue that this limit breaches European Union law.

LORD Lloyd Webber announced that his Really Useful Group faces losses of up to £10 million this year.

THREE million policy-holders with Norwich Union will reap bigger than expected windfalls, worth an average of £1,000, when the insurance company makes its debut on the stock market this week.

THE entire 6,000-strong Royal Marine Corps has been temporarily banned from Cyprus after three soldiers stripped off in a bar.

LEGISLATION from the previous government to protect the victims of obsessive stalkers and others who suffer persistent harassment is to come into force this week.

A £44 MILLION scheme to redevelop Stonehenge has been rejected for lottery funding.

THE Inland Revenue was found guilty of "a pattern of covert discrimination" that denied a specialist job to Keith Riley, one of Britain's few black senior tax inspectors.

TWO supermarket chains — the Co-Op and Iceland — banned alcopops from their stores because they believe they are aimed specifically at under-18s and that the industry is failing to regulate itself responsibly.



The Prime Minister responds to questions from a carefully selected audience in Worcester PHOTO: IAN HODGSON

Blair braves polite question time

SKETCH
Derek Brown

WHERE was the Government Officer, the Prime Minister wanted to know. "Is there a Government Officer here?" he queried. An earnest-looking man behind him bounded to his feet. Tony Blair's faced creased with pure pleasure. "That's the wonderful thing about government. You say you want a Government Officer, and one springs up right away."

The functions of a Government Officer are many and varied. What the Prime Minister required was someone to hand out address cards to those members of the audience who wanted to follow up issues raised at the first, somewhat less than spontaneous, People's Question and Answer Session.

But the Government Officer had already performed a more onerous duty: to help the police of West Mercia hand-pick the audience. The 130 or so men and women in the ornate Guildhall in the heart of Worcester had been invited to lend a respectable and respectful ear to the Prime Minister's words on law and order. There were magistrates, police officers, council officials, members of youth groups, businessfolk: a narrow cross-section of society.

Mr Blair spoke intriguingly of having seen "first-hand this morning the heartache caused by crime and the fear of crime".

What he saw during the public part of his visit was much more encouraging. Even before the Prime Minister arrived at the Guildhall, an impressive crowd of shoppers had gathered, and they gave the Blairs a rousing reception. Inside, the audience was no less friendly, laughing politely at Mr Blair's little jokes. "I'm still at the stage that when I hear the Prime Minister is here, I start looking around," he said. That one will have to be pensioned off soon. There can be no doubting, though, the man's sheer enjoyment of the job, nor his relentless sincerity. Mr Blair had come equipped with a Biggish Idea. For all the talk of a People's Forum, this was his show. He announced a new punishment for young people who commit anti-social offences. Courts would be empowered by the forthcoming Crime Bill to impose reparation orders.

"They will be made to repair the damage. The vandal who has wrecked a bus shelter will have to repaint and rebuild it. The thug who has ruined someone's hedgerow will have to make good the damage."

Then it was jacket off, and down to some serious questions, ranging from the desirability of beat bobbies to the undesirability of alcopops. Mr Blair answered fluently, reasonably and with heroic banality.

A middle-aged man said his son had been murdered nine years ago. The killer had been given a life sentence, and the last home secretary had vowed life would mean life. Would the Government endorse that?

Mr Blair did not shirk the question. He promised to have the Home Secretary look into it.

Fire attack on 'fat cat'

John Sweeney and Marie Woolf

SENIOR executives of the privatised utilities who have benefited from "fat cat" bonuses have been warned by police to increase their personal security after a firebomber attacked the home of a company chairman.

Police are treating as arson a fire at the mansion of the United Utilities chairman, Sir Desmond Pitcher, whose company owns North West Water and the regional electricity firm Norweb.

Sir Desmond, once dubbed "the king of the fat cats", was away from Unston Hall, near Northwich, Cheshire, when the fire broke out. Soon afterwards the Manchester Evening News received a call saying the fire had been started deliberately. The caller warned that other executives could face attacks.

The assistant chief constable of Cheshire, John Dwyer, said: "Until we find out more about this attack, the advice from police to executives of utility companies is to take additional measures to enhance their personal security."

The call came two hours after police were alerted to the fire by an alarm at Sir Desmond's home. The caller, who had an English accent, said: "United Utilities . . ." (pause) ". . . Desmond Pitcher . . . at his home . . . Unston . . . fire-bombed . . . all of the fat cats are terrorist targets." A tape of the call has been passed to police.

"The fire is being treated as suspicious and a criminal investigation has commenced," said a spokesman.

Sir Desmond, aged 64, who earns £310,000, a year plus lavish bonuses, was at the centre of a public row over an extra 87 per cent incentive payment last year. At the same time, 2,500 company jobs were lost. — *The Observer*

Failed asylum seekers to be deported 'promptly'

Alan Travis

MINISTERS are to speed up the deportation of failed asylum seekers and illegal entrants who are removed from Britain as part of an attempt to cut the backlog in immigration cases.

Plans to tighten the enforcement of deportation orders follow new Home Office figures showing that the number of people removed has fallen since 1992 despite a rise in the number of formal orders.

"When we make a decision not to allow someone to remain in this country and there are no special compassionate circumstances then it should be enforced," said a Home Office spokesman on Monday.

But although the Home Office is considering ways of stepping up the number of deportations, it denied reports that it was proposing to send back at least 50,000 illegal immigrants and asylum seekers. The report caused widespread alarm within immigrant communities.

"We have no idéa where the 50,000 figure came from," said a Home Office spokesman. "It may relate to the backlog of asylum applications where there has not yet been a decision."

Labour promised in its election manifesto to speed up asylum decisions. Some are undecided after more than four years. Applications fell by 16,000 last year to 28,000. Refugee status was granted in 6 per cent of decisions and 5,100 won "exceptional leave" to remain.

Meanwhile as many as 15,000 asylum seekers are filling bed and breakfast hotels and other accommodation for the homeless in London. The system for helping them is said to be on the verge of breakdown, and welfare workers fear that social and racial tensions will rise as single men without money or work cluster round hostels for months.

Local authorities say there are nearly 5,000 single adults who are without benefits because they failed to apply for refugee status on arrival in Britain under rules introduced last year. The Refugee Council said it would be far cheaper to restore benefits to them so they could find their own accommodation, and to allow them to work.

Hard line on Europe divides Tory leadership contenders

Michael White

WILLIAM HAGUE'S campaign for the Tory leadership picked up speed on Monday despite a speech that "chilled" the party's left.

The fight has swung decisively against Kenneth Clarke, despite his having won the first round last week, after John Redwood unexpectedly forced Peter Lilley and Michael Howard out of the race — only to see them both back Mr Hague as the man best placed to beat the former chancellor.

In a first-round result that was widely regarded as the worst-case outcome for Conservative hopes of restoring a strong and united leadership, the left-leaning Mr Clarke headed the field with 49 votes, hotly pursued by Mr Hague, aged 36, with 41.

Mr Redwood astonished MPs and pundits by beating both rightwing rivals, with 27 votes to Mr Lilley's 24, leaving Mr Howard in a humiliating fifth place with just 23. All 164 Tory MPs voted.

Within three hours of the vote, Mr Howard and Mr Lilley agreed to deliver as many as possible of their 47 votes to Mr Hague, who was expected to top Tuesday's second-round ballot.

To win outright, a candidate needs a simple majority of 83. Otherwise, the contest goes to a third round on Thursday. Only two candidates go forward, with the third placed candidate dropping out.

On Monday Labour hinted that pro-European Tory MPs had been in informal talks with the party about a breakaway if Mr Hague or Mr Redwood won.

The same day Mr Hague ditched his tactics of posing as the middle-of-the-road candidate. He said any Tory MP who failed to sign up to his anti-single currency policy would not be welcome in his shadow cabinet, a move that infuriated Mr Clarke's pro-European supporters. Mr Hague said: "I intend to say this is my policy — follow me."

A former Cabinet member said he had been chilled by the remark: "He is excluding a whole section of the Conservative party. That is not Conservatism. Division lies ahead and election defeat."

Fury over plans for healthcare charges

David Brindle

THE Government was left battered last week by 24 hours of unremitting controversy over the refusal of Frank Dobson, the Health Secretary, to rule out raising cash for the health service through charges for patient services.

After what was probably their worst day since the general election, ministers insisted that the charges mooted were scaremongering, while repeating the formula that everything was under consideration in the planned health spending review. The scale of the health service's financial crisis was meanwhile further underlined by a warning from health managers that the backlog of hospital maintenance could top £10 billion.

The row over the idea of new patient charges — for seeing a GP, for food and accommodation in hospital and for prescriptions for pensioners, for example — erupted after Mr Dobson told reporters that the spending review would be "no holds barred".

His comments coincided with the release of an open letter to him from doctors at Northwick Park hospital, north London, who said that patient services were at breaking point because of financial pressures.

The Prime Minister, Tony Blair, was later forced to intervene. Fears of new charges, he said, were "completely overblown". He added: "Of course we have got to look at ways to get value for money and make the savings necessary to improve the NHS, but we will not do anything which is against the principle of the NHS or our manifesto."

Mr Dobson professed himself amazed at the controversy. But he and Alistair Darling, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, repeated that the spending review would look at all options. "The key point is that one government, one day, had to take this fundamental look," Mr Darling said. "We are not going to shrink from that task . . . [that] would be irresponsible."

Opposition politicians seized on the Government's discomfort. In a disarming role reversal, Stephen Dorrell, former health secretary, accused Labour of betraying the "historic" principle of NHS care based on need, not ability to pay, which had been reiterated in its manifesto. "Two months later, they have shown this commitment to be worthless," Mr Dorrell said.

The Conservatives gleefully produced a press release issued by Mr Dobson in 1987, when he was shadow health minister, accusing the Tory government of having "kept under wraps the far-right idea of charging for visiting the doctor or for staying in hospital".

The Liberal Democrats said Labour was paying the price for adopting the last government's spending plans for the next two years and for rejecting any suggestion of raising income tax.

Simon Hughes, Lib Dem health spokesman, said: "It is crazy now for the Labour government to imply that higher charges may be introduced but to say that higher public expenditure will be ruled out."

Reaction in the NHS was divided. Some groups said ministers should not even be considering new charges, but others argued that the plight of the service was so grave that the nettle had to be grasped.

At its conference in Cardiff, the Institute of Health Services Management published official figures showing a backlog of £2.4 billion in NHS maintenance in England alone.

Students face £1,000 annual charge for university tuition

John Carvel and James Meikle

THE end of free tuition for undergraduates on full-time degree courses will be urged next month by Sir Ron Dearing's committee of inquiry on higher education, the most far-reaching review of the universities for more than 30 years.

Sir Ron told ministers he wants students to pay £1,000 a year towards the cost of their courses to rescue universities escalating funding crisis without burdening taxpayers.

David Blunkett, the Education and Employment Secretary, was careful throughout the election campaign to avoid ruling out such charges. He committed Labour to opposing top-up fees by individual prestige universities to boost their own income, but left open the possibility of a general fee repayable through an extra National Insurance contribution.

The scheme is likely to cause division among Labour MPs, including six former presidents of the National Union of Students. Douglas Trainer, the union's president, said it would reject Sir Ron's favoured option. "We had two main hopes from the inquiry — a rejection of fees and serious treatment of the issue of student hardship. The suggested option fails on both counts," he said.

Following the row about health charges, the recommendation will raise questions about how far Labour is prepared to go in reform of the welfare state.

Mr Blunkett has told Sir Ron to think the unthinkable, but not expect political approval of the report before public opinion can be gauged. He is aware that tuition fees were proposed by the Conservatives but abandoned in the face of middle-class protest.

A draft of the funding section of the Dearing report was recently discussed by a panel of vice-chancellors, who agreed to present the Government with a series of options for reform but state a preference for a radical proposal to charge fees. Under this favoured option, there would be little change to current methods of funding student maintenance — providing poorer students with a grant covering about half their basic living expenses.

However, Sir Ron thinks it essential to find extra resources for the universities, which are forecasting a £3 billion funding shortfall by 2000-2001 on current projections. The proposal for a £1,000 fee would produce income of up to £1 billion a year.

Ban on religious bias

Alan Travis

DISCRIMINATION on religious grounds is to be made illegal as part of the Government's human rights legislation to be introduced this autumn.

The new law will extend the protection offered by the 1976 Race Relations Act to religious minorities in England and Wales, including the 1 million strong Muslim community which has been pressing for the change for many years.

Sir Herman Ouseley, chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), said last week the banning of religious discrimination would be one immediate effect of the Government's legislation incorporating the European Convention on Human Rights into British law.

He said legislation would give assistance to "those ethnic minorities who want protection against religious discrimination".

A recent report from the Runnymede Trust, a race relations think-tank, suggested that Islamophobia was in danger of becoming "part of the fabric of everyday life" unless the law was changed to outlaw religious discrimination.

Ahmed Versi, editor of Muslim News, said a change in the law would have an impact. "Almost every month we hear of cases where women have been dismissed or have problems at their workplaces because of their headscarves. They cannot take the employers to court."

Although Sikhs have long had an exemption under employment laws to let them wear turbans, no such protection has applied to other ethnic minorities. The Home Office has opposed a ban, arguing it is difficult to find a legal definition distinguishing genuine religions from cults.

Sir Herman said there was a "potentially dangerous" degree of complacency about race relations. He added: "We may think that everything is OK. It is not. Ethnic minorities are still significantly disadvantaged in Britain."

Genes say boys will be boys and girls will be sensitive

Tim Radford

THE SENSITIVE sex was born that way. And boys are oafish because they can't help it. Blame nature, not nurture. The gene machine switches on feminine intuition long before birth, British scientists reported last week.

The same mechanism switches off in boy babies after conception, leaving them to grow up awkward, gauche and insensitive.

The irony is that a girl's talent for tact, social deftness and womanly intuition comes from father, not mother.

"What we might call feminine intuition — the ability to suss out a social situation by observing nuances of expression in voice and so on — is a set of skills of genetic origin which has nothing at all to do with hormones, as far as we know," said David Skuse of the Institute of Child Health in London.

Prof Skuse and colleagues from the Wessex Regional Genetics Laboratory in Salisbury were actually studying Turner's syndrome, a rare condition which affects one female in 2,500.

"A high proportion of girls had serious social adjustment problems, which started around the time they entered school and continued right through to adolescence," he said. Intelligence was normal, but the girls were often short, and in adult life infertile. As children they were less aware of people's feelings, interrupted conversations, made demands of other people's time, and could not "read" body language.

Girls have two X chromosomes, boys an X and a Y. But girls with Turner's syndrome have only one. Some inherited their one X from the mother, some from the father. The ones with the mother's X had the more severe problems. So, the researchers reason, there would be a gene or set of genes switched on or off in the egg, according to the parent from whom they are inherited. Girls normally get the switched on version from fathers, and boys inherit a single X chromosome from their mothers, with the genes switched off.

"Others might feel that men are somehow doomed. Well, we can learn social skills," Prof Skuse said. "Women will pick them up intuitively."

This raised an evolutionary puzzle. "Why would it be advantageous for males to be socially insensitive?"

"If you wanted to recruit boys into an army, a hunting party or a football team, it is an advantage to have those boys socially unskilled so the dominant male in that group can impose a set of social mores," he said.

Gonorrhoea 'epidemic'

Chris Mihill

YOUNG black men in inner city areas have rates of sexually transmitted disease that are 10 to 20 times higher than those found in whites and more than 50 times those in Asians, researchers said last week.

Rates among teenage black girls are higher than in their white or Asian counterparts, with one doctor describing the situation as an epidemic.

Two studies into rates of gonorrhoea carried out in Leeds and in the south London boroughs of Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham, considered age, ethnic origin and social deprivation. Both are published in the British Medical Journal.

The London study analysed the backgrounds of nearly 2,000 people diagnosed as having a first episode of gonorrhoea in the three boroughs during 1994 and 1995.

The rate among black men aged 15 to 19 was 1,342 per 100,000 of the population, compared with 80 among white men of the same age.

Among black men aged 20 to 24, the rate was 1,685 per 100,000 compared with 121 among whites.

For black women aged 15 to 19 the rate was 1,701 per 100,000 compared with 171 among white girls of the same age. For black women aged 20 to 24, the rate was 888 per 100,000 compared with 90 for white women.

One London researcher, Anton Pozniak, senior lecturer in genito-urinary medicine at King's College hospital, said: "There is a gonorrhoea epidemic in south London that requires urgent action. The safe sex message has got to reach those groups the report identifies."

Call to curb company cars

Keith Harper

CHANGES in the tax system to curb the use of company cars were called for last week in a report from both business and environmental interests.

Backed by companies including National Westminster, British Airways and Sainsburys, the report questioned the system that encourages drivers of company cars to use them more.

A statement by the report's steering group said: "Our findings provide strong evidence for the need to review the car taxation system. We hope that the Government will give it serious consideration."

The report, by the Ashden Trust, University of Westminster and London First, examined the driving patterns of 2,000 company car users. It said those who received some free fuel did 20 per cent more commuting miles than those who got no such benefit.

● A drop of 33 per cent in demand for driving tests has been reported last week and attributed to a rising failure rate on the written examination introduced last year.

Learner drivers have to pass the written paper before they can take the driving test. More than a million people have taken the written test and about 40 per cent have failed it, the Driving Standards Agency said, even though it has produced a best-selling book that gives all the questions and answers.

Some have failed 15 times, at £15 a go.

Gas power, page 30



A perilous partnership

Michael White warns against Prince Charles appearing to be too chummy with Tony Blair

LEGEND has it that when Prince Charles was a student at Cambridge he asked his mentor and Master at Trinity College, Rab Butler, if it would be all right if he joined the university Labour Club. The Tory ex-deputy prime minister had gently to explain that probably it would not. True or not, the incident highlights a strain of high-minded political naivety in the heir to the throne which has seen him irritate natural allies such as traditional Anglicans (with his multi-faith talk) and fellow-Greens (fox-hunting and that habit of taking gas-guzzling cars on foreign trips).

It resurfaced again last weekend in "Charles joins Blair in schools crusade" headlines and "Charles and Blair in partnership pact" talk about the welfare-to-work programme. What on earth does the Prince think he is doing? As every schoolboy no longer knows, the Crown is meant to be above party. That is the whole, increasingly tenuous point of keeping the House of Windsor in the manner to which they have become accustomed.

What is more, whenever the royal family plays footsie with one of our great parties, it ends in tears. In the 18th century Princes of Wales plotted against their fathers with the Opposition, thus the future George IV with Charles James Fox, the so-called Hanoverian Reversionary Interest. In the 19th Queen Victoria sacked Peel (1841) and was notorious partial to that old smoothie, Benjamin Disraeli (the prickly alternative was Gladstone). In our own century the golden Prince of Wales ("the last King of England" as his father used to call him) flirted with the dictators (his remark that "something must be done" about mass unemployment was shared by Oswald Moseley, but also by the left). No wonder Baldwin put the skids under him when he refused to abandon Mrs Simpson, the Camilla Parker-Bowles of her day.

What with all the manifest domestic failings of the Royal Family and a significant growth in public indifference — far more dangerous than niche republicanism — they can surely do without political trouble. Didn't they teach the lad any history at Cambridge? It is not simply that it is unwise to mix it with politicians. Uncontroversial to a narcoleptic fault, the Queen is wiser than her father in this respect: he was a Chamberlainite appeaser before restoring his public reputation by staying in London during the Blitz. It is, surely, particularly dangerous to mix it with this Government, which has so much going for it already but must eventually go wrong.

Tony Blair has a majority of 179. He is hugely popular in the polls. He has a delightful, telegenic young family, a successful working wife to whom he is still happily married. Some royal-watchers feel it will take the tabloid heat off the Windsors. But not when they mischievously

Public indifference to royalty is far more dangerous than niche republicanism

talk of the Blairs as "first family" and then report that the other first family at the other end of The Mall is less than happy with such chatter.

Sooner or later (later if the Tories carry on as they are currently doing), the Blairite honeymoon will end. Does Prince Charles really want to be in a "partnership pact" when that happens? When the Government puts up taxes and fails to curb crime, creates a (soon unpopular?) Scottish assembly or gives away a fresh sliver of sovereignty to Brussels? Of course not. The public is already accustomed to the notion that he is closet-New Labour. According to the Sunday Times, Peter Mandelson said jokingly: "You are a secret Blairite," to which the Prince replied: "I gather Mr Blair is a secret me." Needless to say, it is more complicated than that. The Prince's Trust has done serious work for 20 years among the young unemployed and unskilled of the inner cities: 10,000 businesses nurtured, 47,000 people trained or given small grants; up to 60,000 jobs created in the past decade. That is the record Prince Charles himself claimed in his BBC television interview with David Frost last Sunday. It sounds New Labour-ish and it is. He highlighted their shared agenda in this field in a letter to Mr Blair last month.

But the *hereditary* Prince of Wales's Tory views on reform of the *hereditary* Lords do not chime with Jack Straw's quasi-republican leanings or his anti-gun campaign. He is not as fiscally austere as Gordon Brown. Faced with constitutional upheaval it is safe to assume he is *even* more committed to the Union with Ulster than Mo Mowlam who (you may recall) wanted Buck House pulled down and rebuilt by a decent architect. The newly enobled Lord Richard Rogers would be brilliant. Alas, he is not the Prince's kind of brickie.

What seems to have happened last weekend is that the periodic royal inclination to be an "active prince" led him to do the Frost interview. Here he expressed his predictable line on educational standards, ill-advised from someone whose knowledge of state education is limited. There was some hilarity among Labour MPs about the notion of being lectured on education by a prince who finished a privileged schooling at Gordonstoun with a modest crop of five O levels and two A levels. The accompanying spin in the media will have gone further than he probably wanted to go in the headline-generating business. Doubtless, the partnership stuff will be hosed down.

It is important to stress the Palace is behind it, not Downing Street. Blair wants good relations with the Royal Family, but, as with most institutions, he has a fashionably detached attitude towards it. There is not much Labour deference towards what has become the royal soap opera, and one can imagine a future Cabinet coolly deciding (after extensive polling) that its day was done. Bad for the national brand image abroad, bad for family values at home.

It is worth noting last week's Sun report that the Queen had invited the Blair kids to Balmoral this summer with Wills and Harry. The ultimate photo-op, yet the Blairs turned the Queen down. Not as politically naive as some.

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
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Hong Kong: the endgame

AS HONG KONG enters the final weeks before its return to China, the actual transition on the night of June 30 to July 1 continues to dominate the news. This may be a shade perverse, and unfair to the people of Hong Kong. What really matters for them is the months and years ahead, when they hope that the outside world will not lose interest. But the event itself does bear a symbolic weight, not just as a spectacle but as a guide to how those involved — China, Britain and Hong Kong — will behave and interact in the future. Total accord on the final moments would be a fine thing, but no one expected it. Total discord would be a very bad omen indeed. What Hong Kong has at the moment, more prosaically, is something in between.

President Jiang Zemin has confirmed that he will attend the handover and inauguration of the new regime, together with the prime minister, Li Peng. With the huge patriotic weight attached to the event — and his political need to make the most of it ahead of the crucial Communist party congress in the autumn — it would have been surprising, and perhaps disturbing for Hong Kong, if he had stayed away. Tony Blair was well advised to wait for the news before announcing his own intention to come. If the only senior leader attended had been Mr Li of Tiananmen Square notoriety, that would have put Mr Blair in a difficult position.

The British Prime Minister was also right to say clearly, but without excessive emphasis, that he will not attend the inauguration of the China-inspired provisional legislative council (PLC), which supplants the elected body now in existence. Given the controversy over the PLC, China was unlikely to accept a more tactful inauguration by stages: but there is no reason why its guests should have to condone the body in public. The decision of Japan, Australia and New Zealand to do so is a modern version of the kowtow. But the pre-emptive manner in which the United States secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, announced her own decision not to attend "if invited" was also inept. Mr Blair is attempting a measured approach to convince China that, in the current phrase, Hong Kong can be "a bridge and not a barrier" to better relations. His attempt to defend Hong Kong's interests while not antagonising Beijing may prove unsustainable, but it is certainly worth trying.

There should, however, be no shading of position in the latest row over the entry of the Chinese armed forces to Hong Kong. It was accepted that this would be confined before the moment to a preparatory task-force. Now it seems probable that some army generals feel they will lose face if Mr Jiang gets there first. To reopen this issue now would send a very negative signal to the Hong Kong people and must be rejected.

We are not yet in a position to judge on the future, but the evidence appears mixed. The new chief executive, Tung Chee-hwa, is by no means convincing, given his performance so far, when he claims to be a man of principle who would resign if pressurised from Beijing. His commitment to allow political demonstrations "if they are lawful" raises the question of how the law will be interpreted. Yet these words and some of his actions do suggest at least a degree of sensitivity to criticism. He has shown restraint in appointing senior figures to the Court of Final Appeal, which will replace the system of recourse to the Privy Council. And he is maintaining some sort of dialogue with the Democratic party, which will continue to have access to government officials even though excluded from the PLC. There are more difficult issues ahead, but the signs so far are not totally negative. Hong Kong will have a better idea of what it really holds after the midnight ball is over.

Rethinking the route to Europe

THE AMSTERDAM summit of the European Union, which loomed so large in British politics during the general election, now seems less of a do-or-die affair. Important decisions — on foreign policy, immigration controls, qualified majority voting and the powers of the Union's institutions — were expected to be taken by the European leaders this week. *But the sovereignty crisis that once threatened serious disruption has now largely evaporated.*

This has happened for several reasons. In the first place, the sovereignty crisis was talked up during the Inter-Governmental Conference's preparatory process. Now that the words have to be translated into an agreement, there is a predictable mood of compromise, and the moves towards unification in the key areas have been revealed as more modest than the radicals had proposed and less earth-shaking than the conservatives had feared.

The second important change has been in Britain, where the new Labour government has instantly lowered the temperature in relations between the UK and the EU. Tony Blair's willingness to make deals in Europe has not merely led to more normal inter-governmental relations within the union, but it has also defused the issue in British domestic politics. The Conservative party's hysterical inability to follow a constructive path in European policy has been exposed for what it is — a manifestation of its own internal crisis rather than a truthful representation of Britain's national interest in Europe.

But Britain's demands are not actually the issue at Amsterdam. The underlying issue is the single currency. For reasons of history, economics and politics, a change of government in Paris has much greater consequences on the European stage than a change of government in London. Lionel Jospin won his election because the French electorate insisted on retaining welfare provisions and levels of public spending that cannot be maintained within the terms either of the Maastricht treaty or of last year's single currency stability pact. If Mr Jospin's government decides that it cannot fulfil the Maastricht criteria or meet the terms of the stability pact, then the single currency will simply not launch on time. That is what the crisis in Franco-German relations is all about.

Opponents of the single currency always tend to talk up the crisis-making potential of any stumble on the road and to talk down any compromise that the EU comes up with to keep things on track. At Amsterdam, a deal was expected to be far more likely than a split on the issue, because most EU nations prefer to see the single currency succeed than fail. But the moment of truth is near, and the fact that Amsterdam was expected to be preoccupied with ways of making that project more acceptable to an increasingly sceptical European electorate must compel Europe's leaders to rethink their course and their priorities sooner rather than later. The era of "ever closer" institutional union in Europe must close. The new priority must be to deliver popular and practical benefits to Europeans. Outwardly, Amsterdam may not be an epic event, but if it can be a true turning-point, then it will be remembered long after some of its more grandiose predecessors.

Two teams split by an island

IT SHOULD have been a game of two halves in a country of two nations. But last week's football match between under-18 representative teams from the Greek and Turkish areas of Cyprus failed to take place for very familiar reasons. And if two sides can't get together to kick a ball around their own island, there is scant chance of progress when those old sparring partners Glafcos Clerides and Rauf Denktash meet across Kofi Annan's table at the United Nations on July 9 — the leaders' first encounter for nearly three years.

Although Fifa, football's governing body, has never been overblessed with bright ideas, its attempt to help break the 23-year impasse seemed reasonable enough: a game at any level and at venues to be agreed to show that co-operation between implacable enemies is possible. Although a deal was initially reached for two under-18 games either side of Nicosia's Green Line, the problems began when the Greek side wrote back to Fifa telling of successful negotiations in "occupied Lapithos". The Turks disputed the adjective and that was that.

As ever, the real losers in The Game That Never Was are the island's youth. Not one of the 22 who should have played was born when Cyprus was split in 1974, yet once again they have been denied their birthright. The sad truth remains that it is easier for young Greeks and Turks to meet and talk peace in London, where many still come to study, than in their own land. Messrs Clerides and Denktash, septuagenarians who studied in Britain in more peaceful times, should remember that when they head for New York next month.

Bosses must learn to behave better again

Martin Woollacott

THE unemployed were protesting "because they had been scrapped — as horses had been scrapped". It was "an appeal against the unexpected, an appeal to those others who, more fortunate, seemed wiser and more powerful, for something, for *intelligence* . . . this mute mass protested its persuasion that some of these others must have foreseen these dislocations — that, anyhow, they ought to have foreseen — and arranged".

Thus H G Wells, at the turn of the century, on unemployment in Europe. With a few amendments, he could have been writing today. It is useful to remember that capitalism has always been careless of people, and also that the damage suffered in the past was worse than anything that threatens today. Yet it is bad enough, and has some of the same inexorable quality of which Wells complained. Nor have the powerful either foreseen or arranged, or, if they have, they seem to have foreseen the wrong thing.

Even as France and Germany argued over the question of whether the conditions for the single currency should be changed to reflect the primacy of employment, there was a sudden spurt of a dismally familiar kind of company news. The Swedish-Swiss conglomerate Asea Brown Boveri announced it would be cutting its west European workforce by 57,000, while creating other jobs in Asia. Electrolux followed with the announcement that it will cut its global workforce by 11 per cent, with most of the cuts in Europe and North America. Pilkington Glass also announced significant cuts. In just 10 days, three European firms had cut jobs on a scale large enough to be compared with the numbers mentioned in the new French and British governments' proposals on job creation, less than wholly believable though those are. If, for every job that government helps create, industry removes one, then the futility of the process is apparent.

Those who run companies feel as confined in their choices as anybody else. If they did not make these moves, they argue, their firms would suffer or even die. European corporations see themselves squeezed between their counterparts in the United States, who have the advantage of a huge home market, and their Far Eastern competitors, subject to little shareholder pressure, who hold down prices to gain market share.

In the Anglo-Saxon world, the pressure to perform is relentless, and this pressure is growing in Europe, particularly in Germany. If companies, because of that pressure, among other factors, are now going fully into an Anglo-Saxon phase of restructuring, then much worse may lie ahead in the way of unemployment. Germany, notoriously, has lost 1 million jobs in five years, and its companies are busy building plants in eastern Europe, Asia and Latin America. If west European industry is massively relocating outside western Europe, then arguments about the best governmental approach to unemployment would have to be seen as of limited relevance.

True, a mere totting up of jobs cut and jobs moved out ignores productivity gains, jobs emerging in other sectors or jobs which, once done within the core company, have now been farmed out and are counted differently. If some kinds of production are no longer viable in Europe, others certainly are. Nor is unemployment in itself the fundamental problem, which is that the nature of work is changing. Work becomes dependent on the rapid bringing together, on a global scale, of the right assortment of resources, a process that may exploit some of those brought in, and at the same time ignores whole groups of people who are not part of the circuit. Work becomes less durable, more elusive, more oriented to particular projects.

These changes have been well described by the sociologist Manuel Castells, who argues, however, that European unemployment is exceptional, a consequence largely of the obsession with inflation-fighting and monetary stability that Germany has inflicted on other states. If one follows thinkers such as Castells, what needs to be combated is the tendency of the new economy to degrade workers and to condemn others to what he calls the "black holes" of international capitalism, underclass zones that make up "a Fourth World of exclusion" in much of Africa and rural Asia, and in the inner cities of the rich world.

THERE IS a general view that there are two ways to react to changes in the world economy. One, the US and British, maintains job levels quite well, but diminishes job security and widens pay differentials. The other, the Continental, loses jobs, but better maintains security and pay for those who do stay in work, and is relatively generous to those who do not. This choice — which can be unappetisingly seen as between more unemployment or more inequality — is what is being debated within the European Union as the attempt is made to reconcile the differing approaches of the Jospin, Kohl and Blair governments. Yet even if different European governments could arrive at a compromise, there is a limit to what they can do.

What operates in the business world is a constant pressure to be more ruthless and less open to human considerations than competitors. The point below which no business behaviour will sink needs to be pushed up. This may happen only when a critical mass of firms, noting the many problems of ruthlessness and cost cutting, return to higher standards. Governments can push them in that direction.

In Wells's novel, the unemployment crisis was solved by "such devices as simple decorative work in wood and stone, the manufacture of handwoven textiles, fruit growing, flower growing and landscape gardening on a grand scale", these being temporary expedients while a massive programme of education was put in place. That has the vague, unworkable feel of many modern nostrums for the same disease. Let us hope that the French challenge on unemployment, even if the immediate result is a rather empty compromise, leads to more convincing solutions.

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France and Germany, the ties that bind

COMMENT
Daniel Vernet

IN THE week that the French and German leaders meet in Poitiers, it is time to realise that the Germans are unlucky. Ever since Chancellor Helmut Kohl lost his privileged partner, François Mitterrand, in May 1995, the leaders in Bonn have been pinning their hopes on one replacement after another, all of whom have proved to be short-lived.

Before the French presidential election in 1995, they put their faith in Jacques Delors, then president of the European Commission. When Delors declined to stand for the presidency, they counted on Edouard Balladur moving into the Elysée — he seemed to them to be closer to the Christian-Democratic tradition than his opponent, Jacques Chirac, who went on to win.

But they were reassured by the new president's conversion, just months after being elected, to the Maastricht treaty's disciplines.

Unfortunately for Kohl, this month's French parliamentary elections sprang a further surprise on him by giving power to Lionel Jospin's Socialist party. Having barely got used to Chirac's unpredictable style, Kohl now has to contend with a new power-sharing government and a Socialist prime minister whose first gesture has been to question something the German government holds sacred — the stability pact, on which the German finance minister, Theo Waigel, has lavished much care over the past two years.

Kohl probably does not share the same veneration for the 3 per cent budget deficit limit, but he is aware that the stability pact is also a political tool calculated to allay the misgivings of small savers, markets and the Bundesbank.

The new Franco-German co-operation has got off to a shaky start, and the new players will quickly have to acquire the reflexes that for decades have prevented disagreements between Paris and Bonn from degenerating into serious crises. Whether one is for or against it, the Franco-German entente is fundamental to European unity, and hence to French influence in international affairs.

The presence at the head of key French ministries, and in Jospin's inner sanctum, of people who are well aware of this obvious fact has been perceived in Bonn as a guarantee that France will, in the words of Wolfgang Schaüble, leader of the Christian Democrats in the Bundestag, "remain as reliable a partner in Europe as Germany".

The need for France and Germany to co-operate does not mean that one of the partners has routinely to give in to the other. From the time the Federal German Republic was created, right up to the end of the cold war, the Germans have been making major concessions to European unity. These sometimes cost them dearly in financial terms, but in return they received something priceless — their integration into the international community.

Kohl continues to maintain that Europe is the best way of protecting Germany's neighbours from Germany and the Germans from themselves — and he insists European integration is a question of war or peace in Europe.

Even if his declarations are a little pompous, they are historically well-founded. The alternative to the European Union is a return to a policy of going it alone, which Germany has pursued on several occasions since its unification in 1871 — with disastrous consequences. Nothing guarantees that younger Germans, less bound by the weight of history than the generation in power today, will not be tempted one day to retread old ground. Nothing, that is, other than an EU sufficiently integrated to stifle any such inclinations.

Which is why European policy and Franco-German relations require tact on both sides. We are no longer in the days when Charles de Gaulle could pursue an "empty-chair policy" for months on end. On the other hand, fear of triggering a crisis should not hold back claims that are considered to be legitimate.

Two mistakes are to be avoided: assuming that Germany has no option but to give in, or imagining that France has an alternative to cooperating with Bonn, for example rapprochement with Britain, or the construction of a southern bloc. Successive French governments, whatever their political hue, have been tempted to readjust the balance in the Paris-Bonn relationship, and such attempts have always been doomed to failure.

As profound disagreements re-emerge over the stability pact, unemployment and the general trend of economic policy, how far can French and German leaders go without jeopardising more than 30 years of co-operation?

One episode should give pause for thought. It goes back to the first months of the war in Yugoslavia, which caused serious strains between Paris and Bonn. Germany was pressing for swift recognition of Slovenian and Croatian independence, but Paris demurred. On the night of December 15, 1991, a rupture appeared inevitable at the foreign ministers' council of the European Community. But at four o'clock in the morning a compromise was hammered out. Neither Paris nor Bonn wanted to run the risk of provoking a major crisis just a few days after concluding the Maastricht treaty.

With the ink barely dry on a treaty that would set up a common foreign policy, it would have been a bad omen if the two countries fell out over a fundamental issue. The decision was taken in the name of European cohesiveness.

The terms of the current debate over the euro are not so different. Without showing any enthusiasm for the pact, the French justice minister, Elisabeth Guigou, who has spent many years handling European policy, declared in 1995 that "political compensations will have to be made to the Germans for the sacrifices they have accepted on their currency".

But the Germans also know such compensations cannot run radically counter to their privileged partner's domestic political options.

(June 13)



'Whatever happened to Juppé?'

Resignation deepens Haiti crisis

Jean-Michel Caroit in Santo Domingo

THE HAITIAN prime minister, Rosny Smarth, resigned on June 9, less than a week before the second round of the parliamentary and local government elections, following months of pressure from the former president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

The resignation increases the hostility between the Lavalas Political Organisation (OPL), led by Smarth, and the Famille Lavalas, the party that Aristide formed in January. Smarth and the OPL have been unsuccessfully pressing for the first round of elections held on April 6 to be declared null and void because they contend they were rigged and that the Electoral Council favoured the Famille Lavalas, whose three candidates were elected.

While Smarth admitted that the situation in the country was "very difficult", and that the government had failed to meet all of the population's demands, he did not hide his bitterness at the "absence of principles, morality and a viable alternative", which he said characterises Haitian politics.

For several months, working-class organisations, claiming loyalty to ex-president Aristide, have fostered an atmosphere of tension and sometimes agitated violently against the prime minister, whom they accuse of wanting to implement a "neo-liberal plan dictated by foreign powers".

Taking advantage of the discontent of a population whose wretched living conditions have been getting worse, these organisations are stepping up calls for a strike. Secondary school children were involved in the violent demonstrations that erupted in Port-au-Prince last month, while a recent strike by airport employees caused a total shutdown of air traffic.

Paul Déjean, minister of Haitians living abroad, who was once close to Aristide, accuses the former president of being responsible for the crisis because of his "overweening ambition". However, Fr Joaquim Samedi of the Sainte-Hélène parish condemned what he called a "plot" to liquidate the former head of state with the help of the CIA and the OPL.

Aristide, whose presidential term was cut short by a military coup, returned to Haiti in October 1994 with the help of United States troops. With an eye on the presidential elections in 2000, he has created a new image of himself as an opponent of imperialism and neo-liberalism. With access to substantial funds, some provided by Taiwan, he has sworn — according to several people who have spoken to him recently — "to wipe out the OPL".

Smarth's resignation worsens Haiti's leadership crisis. In the short term, it threatens to imperil the second round of elections, which the OPL and almost all the mainstream parties have announced they will boycott. The economic reform plan, introduced with great difficulty by the outgoing prime minister, and on which much of Haiti's international aid depends, is also likely to be seriously compromised.

(June 11)

A door opened, an election promise kept

EDITORIAL

THE new government's first concrete act has been to regularise the situations of some of the foreigners living in France without residence permits. It marks a radical change of outlook and bodes well for a different way of handling the question of immigration.

This courageous 180-degree turn is aimed at settling a dispute that has been steadily deteriorating since 300 Africans without residence permits took refuge in a Paris church on March 22, 1996.

After 15 long months of protest marches and hunger strikes, punctuated by some unsavoury incidents — and much equivocation on the part of the former prime minister, Alain Juppé — the time has come to turn over a new leaf and accept that foreigners, who have acquired families and have been working here for many years without ever being able to obtain the famous "permits", have the right to live in France undisturbed.

Until legislation is amended to ban the expulsion of persons without giving them any right to live in the country, this goes some way towards recognising the shortcomings of the 1993 Pasqua Amendment on immigration.

But, more simply, the change is also an admission that in a democratic — not a police — state, foreigners do manage to stay on illegally for many years, make themselves indispensable by their work, and put down permanent family roots.

No government of a country that has been historically open to immigration can dispense with the need to wipe the slate clean from time to time without running the risk of seeing the ranks of those without permits swelling and thus creating a potentially explosive situation.

Spain, Italy, Greece and Portugal have recently carried out sweeping regularisations of foreigners living in their countries without proper documents. And Germany maintains de facto toleration of many foreigners whose applications for asylum have been rejected.

In France — apart from the generous regularisations of 1981 (carried out under President Mitterrand), which were far more extensive than the circular the new interior minister, Jean-Pierre Chevènement, is preparing to issue — a limited operation in 1991 granted residence permits to those whose applications for asylum had been dismissed. The recent Debré Amendment provides for similar measures for certain categories of people without permits.

By opening the door to a reconsideration of such applications on simple humanitarian grounds, the Socialist government of the prime minister, Lionel Jospin, is both keeping an election promise and sending out a signal to every French citizen who demonstrated in support of people without residence permits, and who signed petitions denouncing the Debré Amendment.

This puts an end to a festering grievance and heralds a change of policy, but it still needs to take the form of a new approach to immigration issues — one that is not concerned exclusively with repression, but where North-South relations and economic and cultural contributions are also taken into account. The government's decision is a realistic one, contrary to what its detractors say. Here, realism goes hand-in-hand with humanism.

(June 11)

Multiracial alliance aims to challenge ANC

Frédéric Chambon in Johannesburg

THE South African press has hailed Roelf Meyer's plans to launch a new party as the most important political event since the country's first democratic election in 1994. Meyer used to belong to F W de Klerk's National Party (NP), which ran South Africa under the apartheid regime.

Disappointed at being unable to reform the party, of which he was regarded as being second in command, Meyer handed in his resignation on May 17. Only a few days later, he set about creating South Africa's first non-racial political entity, the New Movement Process (NMP), which is as keen to gain the support of blacks as it is to attract whites.

The long-term aim cherished by Meyer — the only white leader who enjoys some degree of popularity in the country's black townships — is that the NMP will grow into an opposition party capable of challenging the hegemony of Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC).

Meyer's plans are still at an early stage, and no new party has yet been officially constituted. But the setting up of regional branches should bolster his initiative, which could well revolutionise South Africa's political landscape.

Meyer's resignation from the NP would seem to confirm that the white minority's main party has turned in upon itself and imploded. For several months now, reformers and conservatives have been at each other's throats over what place their party should occupy in the "new" South Africa.

Meyer clashed with the NP's old guard when he suggested it should shake off its image as "the party of apartheid" and extend its electoral base to include a fraction of the black population.

De Klerk ended up siding with hardliners in his party and argued that Meyer's attempts to change it were too audacious and too far removed from the concerns of the NP's traditional constituency. The former president chose to put all his money on the section of the electorate that consists of white conservatives, who have tended to take an increasingly hard line as their privileges have eroded.

Although this strategy will pay off in the short term, it binds the NP's future electoral fortunes to the defence of the interests of a minority whose support alone will garner no more than 15 per cent of the vote.

To make matters worse, Meyer's resignation from the NP prompted many of its youngest and most dynamic leaders to follow suit. He has also received support from Pik Botha, a former foreign minister who has now left politics and who is disappointed by De Klerk's lurch to the right.

Long hailed as the architect of the South African "miracle", De Klerk now seems incapable of embodying a spirit of openness that would enable his party and his community to embrace a multiracial South Africa.

Meyer, on the other hand, is ideally placed to express the progressive aspirations of the white community's moderate fringe. This means he has begun to encroach on the electoral territory of Tony Leon's Democratic party, which represents white liberals. He has already started talks with Leon.

Meyer has also met black political leaders, because he wants to broaden the appeal of his movement by rejecting the racial divide that continues to dominate political life in South Africa.

That ethos of division has thrived since the 1994 election, and guarantees the ruling ANC an overwhelming majority. Although the slowness of change in the townships has prompted a certain discontent among some ANC supporters, the phenomenon has not yet gathered enough momentum to result in a protest vote against Mandela's party.

With elections due in 1999, Meyer's aim is to turn the public's mounting disenchantment to the advantage of a multiracial opposition capable of challenging the ruling party's record in office.

With that in mind, Meyer could look to support from people on the ANC's left wing who have acted as mouthpieces for the disappointment felt in the black townships. He has, for example, met Bantu Holomisa, a former leading member of the ANC who was expelled from the party after making a speech that was regarded as too radical and populist.

For the time being, no formal alliance is on the cards between Meyer's movement and either the Democratic party or the movement that Holomisa is trying to get off the ground.

Meyer has done no more than set in motion a possible realignment of political forces in South Africa, and he still has a long way to go before he will be able to assemble an electoral force capable of challenging the dominance of the ANC.

But the stirrings of a genuinely multiracial opposition party mark the first sign of political maturity and normalisation in a democracy that still bears the scars of apartheid.

(June 10)

Romania lays foundations to join Nato

Christophe Chatelot in Bucharest

BY SIGNING a treaty of friendship and co-operation with Ukraine on June 2, Romania wants to give itself the best possible chance of influencing the Nato summit meeting due to be held in Madrid on July 8-9.

Bucharest hopes that the agreement — which President Emil Constantinescu and his Ukrainian counterpart, Leonid Kuchma, described as "historic" — will help break down the resistance of those Nato countries opposing Romania's inclusion in the first wave of new members to the alliance.

Broadly, the treaty of friendship stipulates that the two countries' present borders will remain inviolable and the rights of minorities will be respected. To reach an agreement, both countries had to make a number of concessions.

Bucharest accepted the fact that the text would not explicitly condemn the Russo-German non-aggression pact signed by Joachim von Ribbentrop and Vyacheslav Molotov in 1939. Under the terms of that agreement, Romania lost several territories — Northern Bukovina and two administrative regions in the north of the Danube delta — which reverted to Ukraine after the break-up of the Soviet Union.

The final text contains a compromise formula that denounces "the unjust acts of totalitarian regimes and military dictatorships which affected relations between Romania and Ukraine".

Kiev, for its part, has adopted a more flexible stance on the future of the 500,000 Romanians living in Ukraine, whose rights will be determined by Council of Europe recommendations.

Similarly, Romania has shifted its position on the issue of a former Romanian islet in the Black Sea that is now in Ukrainian territory. In an appendix to the June 2 agreement, both parties agree that this tiny territory should be demilitarised.

After signing similar treaties with Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Hungary in recent years, the agreement with Ukraine marks yet another step in Romania's bid to normalise relations with its neighbours following the break-up of the Eastern bloc.

As the June 2 edition of the popular daily, Evenimentul Zilei, pointed out, "our country is trying by every means at its disposal to earn the favours of Nato's member countries and, to that end, doing all it can to consolidate relations with its neighbours".

The political community as a whole and almost nine out of 10 Romanians favour Nato membership — a higher proportion than in any other country hoping to join. A failure in its membership bid in Madrid next month could have repercussions on Romania's domestic politics.

Although for the first time in their history Romanians face no direct threat from the Russian or Soviet empire, they still have nightmares about being sucked back into Moscow's sphere of influence. Were Nato not to invite Romania to the negotiating table, many of its inhabitants would feel let down by the West.

Constantinescu is doing his best to play down the situation. But he knows that part of the responsibility for any failure at the Madrid summit would be laid at his door.

(June 6)



Almost nine out of 10 Romanians are in favour of their country becoming a member of Nato
PHOTOGRAPH: VADIM GHIRDA

Warlord pays heavy price for Lebanon's bloody war

Jean-Pierre Langellier in Beirut

SAMIR GEAGEA, former head of the Maronite Christian militia known as the Lebanese Forces (FL), has been rotting in a cell in the basement of the Lebanese defence ministry for more than three years.

Geagea, who has received three death sentences which were later commuted to life, continues to be regarded by many Lebanese, seven years after the end of hostilities, as a solitary scapegoat for the civil war that devastated the country between 1975 and 1990.

"My husband is being held in illegal and extremely harsh conditions," Mrs Geagea says. "Since his arrest on April 21, 1994, he has been kept isolated in an underground cell where he never sees daylight. Solitary confinement of that kind is against the law. It is only authorised during interrogations, and then only for a maximum period of a few weeks. He is not allowed to read newspapers, listen to the radio or watch television. All he has access to are books that have no political content."

Every day, Geagea is allowed out to get some fresh air for an hour, though he is entitled by law to a three-hour exercise period. He is blindfolded whenever he is moved around the prison. The only cause for optimism is that for the past six months he has not been forced to wear handcuffs.

Geagea is allowed to talk to his wife twice a week through a glass panel. He communicates with his lawyers under the same conditions, which are illegal. He cannot consult the doctor of his choice. Members of the International Committee of the Red Cross have never been allowed to visit him.

During the grim years of the civil war, Geagea was a fierce and determined warlord. Under his leadership, the FL, like other militia groups, was prepared to steal, blackmail, kidnap and murder in order to achieve its ends.

The question that remains unanswered is: did he order the murder in October 1990 of Dany Chamoun, the head of a Christian party that was a rival of the FL? A special court whose verdicts are not subject to appeal ruled in June 1995 that he did. Yet the prosecution's case was unconvincing, and the trial marred, according to Amnesty International, by numerous irregularities.

But it was another case — the February 1994 bombing of a Maronite church in Zouk Mokhail, which killed 11 people — which, despite the general amnesty voted in 1991, caused the Chamoun case to be reopened and Geagea to be arrested. However, the FL chief was subsequently cleared of any responsibility in the Zouk Mokhail case.

There is a widespread feeling in Lebanon that Geagea is paying for the countless crimes committed during the country's long drawn out and bloody civil war. Many who played a leading role in that war are now members of parliament or the government, even though they have blood on their hands.

It is widely believed that Geagea, who fell victim in 1994 to an act of political revenge engineered by pro-Syrian Christians, is continuing to pay a heavy price for having been the only person, apart from the Maronite patriarch, Monsignor Nasrallah Sfeir, to have consistently denounced Syria's stranglehold over his country.

Sfeir has regularly protested against Geagea's continued detention and called for "justice to be the same for everyone".

Mrs Geagea remains optimistic: "I know he'll come out of prison when the situation in the region permits." That day will come only when Syria and its henchmen no longer regard his release as being politically dangerous.

(June 8-9)

Le Monde

Directeur: Jean-Marie Colombani

Jury Recommends Death for McVeigh

Tom Kenworthy and Lois Romano in Denver

A FEDERAL jury last week condemned Timothy J. McVeigh to death for the April 19, 1995, bombing of a federal office building in Oklahoma City that killed 168 people, injured hundreds more, and shattered a complacent nation's belief that the face of random political terror could never be American.

McVeigh, sitting with his elbows on the defense table and his hands clasped in front of his face, appeared absolutely unshaken by U.S. District Court Judge Richard P. Matsch's announcement of the jury's recommendation that McVeigh die.

The 29-year-old Persian Gulf War veteran mouthed "it's all right" to his family, and gave a nod and a small wave of his fingers to the seven-man, five-woman jury as marshals escorted him from the courtroom. Matsch will formally sentence McVeigh to death by lethal injection at a later date.

McVeigh's younger sister and close confidante, Jennifer, cried as Matsch said to the hushed courtroom, "The jury recommends by unanimous vote that the defendant Timothy J. McVeigh shall be sentenced to death." McVeigh's father, William McVeigh, slumped in his seat, and his mother, Mildred Frazer, showed no outward emotion until afterward, when she wept as lawyers hugged and consoled her.

McVeigh's lead defense counsel, Stephen Jones, said even before the verdict was read that the case would be appealed. McVeigh was tried under a 1994 federal anti-terrorism statute that has yet to be tested at the Supreme Court. His was the first case under that statute to proceed to sentencing.

Outside the federal courthouse, when word filtered out to the street where several hundred spectators eagerly awaited the sentencing decision, the reaction was more subdued than when McVeigh was convicted on June 2 of using a truck bomb to destroy the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building.

So, also, was the response of survivors and relatives of victims, who quietly hugged and held hands, appearing to appreciate the grave solemnity of the jury's decision to end a human life.

Marsha Kight, who lost her 23-year-old daughter in the explosion and who has attended virtually the entire trial, said she would have preferred to see a sentence of life in prison: "There is a lot of pain in living — death is pretty easy."

McVeigh's execution "can't come too soon," said Blanche Tomlin, whose 46-year-old son died in the explosion. "It's what we wanted."

"The punishment fits the crime," said Jim Denny, whose two children were seriously injured. "It's one more terrorist off the street."

The recommendation capped an 11-week trial that tested the government's commitment to deal swiftly and resolutely with acts of anti-government terror and its promise of showing no mercy toward those accused of the worst act of mass murder in American history.

The sentence is also a prelude to the second act of the bombing's legal drama, the upcoming trial of McVeigh's co-defendant Terry L. Nichols, who likely will be tried early in the fall before a new jury.

Chief prosecutor Joseph H. Hartzler said: "We're pleased the system worked and justice prevailed. But the verdict doesn't diminish the great sadness that occurred in Oklahoma City two years ago. Our only hope is that the verdict will go some way to preventing such a terrible, drastic crime from ever occurring again."

In Washington, President Clinton thanked the jury for its "grave decisions," but declined further comment because of the upcoming Nichols trial.

In considering a death sentence, jurors had to be unanimous in their findings that there were seven so-called aggravating circumstances associated with McVeigh's crimes, including his intention to kill, his premeditation, that he created a grave risk to others with reckless disregard for their lives and created severe losses for the victims' families.

In returning a recommendation of death after a mere 11 hours of deliberations over two days, the jury accepted the government argument that the bombing and the deaths of so many was precisely the kind of heinous crime that Congress had in mind when it expanded the federal death penalty in 1988, and again in 1994.

The decision that McVeigh should die came 11 days after the jury found him guilty of all 11 counts of murder, conspiracy and use of a weapon of mass destruction.

He faces several years in the isolation of a federal prison cell, as the legal machinery grinds through what could be several years of appeals, first to the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals and then, possibly, to the U.S. Supreme Court.



Victims' relatives in Oklahoma City react to the of McVeigh's sentence
PHOTOGRAPH: WILLIAM PILPOTT

Middle East: Don't Let It Get Worse

COMMENT
Stephen S. Rosenfeld

AS SUPERFICIALLY appealing as is the case to let the current Israeli-Palestinian standoff slip into an indefinite pause, it is a dangerous case that badly needs to be rooted out of Clinton administration thinking before tension in the region turns to tumult or worse.

The administration's view, as stated by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, is that it's "up to the parties" to thaw their now-frozen negotiating process: "We cannot make decisions for them that they are not willing to make for themselves." But this is the counsel not so much of despair as of timidity. It is evasion disguised as prudence.

Robert Satloff of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, takes the argument a bit further in a paper on the "Oslo impasse." He lets the Israelis off easy: He accepts the sitting Likud government's "rejection of the type of consultative Israeli-Palestinian 'partnership' envisioned under Labor," and he excuses as unwise but not Oslo-prohibited such events as the Jerusalem tunnel and the new East Jerusalem building — events that enrage Palestinians. But he is ready to get tough on the Palestinians for the security violations that enrage Israelis.

Terrorism must be condemned and fought, especially terrorism that is condoned and perhaps even facilitated by someone who has taken on a solemn obligation of peace to another. But the readiness to condone and conduct terrorism and certainly the political capacity to combat it in one's own ranks have a political aspect. Curse him for it, but the fact is that Yasser Arafat will do better in some political circumstances than in others, and everybody knows it. He is least likely to crack down on his side's terrorists when new Israeli settlements preempt the Palestinians' possibilities of pursuing their goals at the bargaining table.

It is not just a situation where the Israelis are bargaining hard. It is a situation where the Israeli government has publicly, repeatedly and convincingly shown that it rejects the very premise on which the Palestinians entered negotiations. For peace they expected to receive back land — and more than the slum of Gaza and a few postage stamps in the West Bank. The Likud government in Israel has an expansionist program that keeps it from fulfilling the promise of territorial concession held out by Labor.

Palestinian terrorism is in some measure a response to Israeli policy, and will diminish as Israeli policy moderates. But Israel's stiffening at the bargaining table is not a response to some Palestinian action but is a result of its own deeply felt ideology and its security fears.

Clinton Calls for Dialogue on Race

Peter Baker in San Diego

PRESIDENT Clinton last Saturday launched what he hopes will be "a great and unprecedented conversation about race" in the United States that will dissect the issues polarizing Americans along ethnic lines and "transform the problem of prejudice into the promise of unity".

With lofty rhetoric flavored by moments of blunt talk but no grand initiatives, Clinton opened a yearlong campaign of town-hall meetings, conferences and reports intended to bridge the nation's lingering racial divide three decades after the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

"We have torn down the barriers in our laws," he declared at the multi-ethnic University of California-San Diego. "Now we must break down the barriers in our lives, our minds and our hearts . . . That is the unfinished work of our time — to lift the burden of race and redeem the promise of America."

In choosing California as the setting for the kickoff, Clinton came to the nation's leading battleground over race and its impact on hiring, education and contracting. Offering a vigorous defense of affirmative action, he directly took issue with state voters who passed Proposition 209 last year abolishing racial preferences in public programs.

While they did so "without any ill motive", Clinton said, such a backlash against affirmative action has led to a steep drop in minority enrollments in law schools and other graduate programs, a trend he fears may extend to the undergraduate level.

With California university regent Ward Connerly, the prime champion of Proposition 209, sitting on stage behind him, Clinton added, "To those who oppose affirmative action, I ask you to come up with an alternative. I would embrace it if I could find a better way."

For a president born into Southern segregation yet reared on principles of equal opportunities, the speech and the efforts to follow are an attempt to fashion a legacy as a healer and conciliator. However, the 36-minute speech contained precious few solutions. Many of the phrases and sentiments expressed in the address are familiar themes in Clinton speeches.

At the last minute, Clinton dropped some language that might have seemed harsher. In an earlier draft, he called the impact of the California affirmative action repeal "devastating" and added, "I call it resegregation" — two lines that did not show up in the final version.

At times, though, Clinton spoke in more candid and challenging ways. "If a black American commits a crime, condemn the act," he said, "but remember that most African-Americans are hard-working, law-abiding citizens." In similar vein, he urged Americans not to draw larger conclusions if "a Latino gang member deals drugs" or "an Asian merchant discriminates against her customers of another minority group" or "white teenagers beat a young African American boy almost to death just because of his race."

The president told white Americans not to feel alienated. "I know that for many white Americans, this conversation may seem to exclude them or threaten them," he said. "That must not be so. I believe white Americans have just as much to gain as anybody else from being a part of this endeavor."

Reaction to the nationally televised speech broke along predictably ideological lines, with many liberals describing it as a positive first step and conservatives complaining it focuses more attention on skin color.

Rep. John Lewis, D-Georgia, a hero of the civil rights movement who accompanied Clinton, said, "It was a very moving statement about race. He was not speaking just as some political figure but as a human being."

But Connerly, who is black, said "Where the American people want to go is get beyond this whole issue of race."

Elmer 'Geronimo' Pratt and his wife, Ashaki, outside Orange County Jail last week PHOTO: QALLY SKAU

Black Panthers' Ex-Leader Freed on Bail

William Booth
In Santa Ana, California

AFTER serving 25 years for a murder he says he did not commit, Elmer "Geronimo" Pratt, a former leader of the Black Panther Party, was freed last week on $25,000 bail.

Pratt walked out of Orange County jail just two weeks after a state judge here ordered a new trial, ruling that Pratt's 1972 conviction was tainted by the prosecutor's failure to reveal that a crucial witness was also a police and FBI informant.

"The truth is going to come out," Pratt, 49, said after his release to a cheering crowd outside the jail. "I am contributing to the power of the people. The struggle continues." Former comrades from the black power movement erupted in applause when Orange County Superior Court Judge Everett Dickey ordered Pratt released.

Pratt's release caps a long legal battle to uncover the truth about a case that shed light on the open warfare of the 1960s between radical groups, especially the Panthers, and the government. For more than two decades, Pratt's supporters and international human-rights groups claimed he was a political prisoner, railroaded by zealous, corrupt federal and local law-enforcement agents committed to "neutralizing" leaders of the black power movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Pratt said his first duty was to visit his 94-year-old mother in Louisiana, whom he has not seen since being jailed. After his release Pratt was driven to the San Francisco area to see his 17-year-old daughter graduate. She, and a younger brother, were conceived during conjugal visits during his years in prison, eight of them spent in solitary confinement. Pratt was denied parole 16 times.

Speaking of late President Richard Nixon and FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, Pratt said: "They tried to kill us all."

In a packed courtroom before his release, Pratt, in a husky rough voice, addressed Dickey and reasserted his innocence by stating, "Who killed Mrs. Olsen?"

Pratt was convicted in 1972 of the murder of Caroline Olsen, a 27-year-old second-grade teacher who died after being shot during a robbery at a Santa Monica tennis court in the early evening of December 18, 1968. Her assailants got about $18. Her husband was also wounded. At the time of the murder, Pratt says he was 400 miles away in Oakland at a gathering of Panthers.

As a demolition expert and member of a long-range reconnaisance team for the 82nd Airborne, Pratt served two tours in Vietnam, was awarded two purple hearts and a silver star. After his honorable discharge, he drove to Los Angeles in 1968, where he enrolled in UCLA as part of it's "High Potential Program," which offered education to disadvantaged youth.

An Odd State of Affairs

COMMENT
Ellen Goodman

TO THINK my generation once wanted our military leaders to Make Love Not War. Be careful what you wish for. Nearly three decades later all hell has broken loose, if hell is the right word to use for the serial scandal of sex, sin and soldiers.

Where are we now?

Lt. Kelly Flinn, the first woman B-52 pilot, has been banned forever from the cockpit. Lying about her lover made her morally unfit to drop nuclear bombs on our enemies. Maj. Gen. John E. Longhouser has resigned from his top post at Aberdeen Proving Ground. A man with a Purple Heart was toppled by an affair of the heart. Air Force Gen. Joseph Ralston is now out of the running for head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He's disqualified from making military policy because of making civilian whoopee.

The gods must be laughing. Venus and Mars that is, though you may not be able to tell them apart in this cross-dressing event of love and war.

A saga that began in Aberdeen as a serious scandal about rape, sexual harassment and abuse of power has degenerated into a scandal sheet to be filled with the names of anyone in the military who's had consensual sex outside of marriage.

But as the adultery hot line rings, there is also a growing sense that something has gotten out of hand. Disqualified by a decade-ago affair? Run out by a relationship that a wife pardoned?

Indeed if there's any good news, it's this growing squeamishness about the random blood-pinning of "A's." It signals the breakup of an unholy alliance of the religious right and secular left over investigating the personal lives of public people.

Remember in 1987 when Gary Hart walked the political plank of the good ship "Monkey Business"? Some strange political bedfellows, puritans and feminists, joined in applause. Some blamed Hart for breaking his vows to God, others blamed him for the look in his wife's eyes.

There was always less agreement than there seemed to be between these sides of a great cultural divide. Under the surface, they hold different moral attitudes about sex.

One is as straightforward as 10 commandments, the other as complex as human relationships. One holds a single, sinful judgment about adultery that is the same for all people and circumstances, the other weighs and balances, disapproves and yet believes that "It depends."

Bill Clinton has divided and reunited this coalition time and again in the Ms. Jones debacle. But now the military's random attack on adultery has made the seams split. In the issue of consensual sex, a touchy, uncertain, fluid majority is again leaning toward the side of "It depends."

In civil and civilian America, most disapprove of adultery, but know that it happens. They recognize the treachery, but listen to the individual circumstances. They acknowledge the destructive power of infidelity, but may understand.

Now the Pentagon has moved onto this touchy territory with all the delicacy of a tank battalion. They claim that the military only pursues adultery charges when it impacts "good order and discipline," but can't define how or when that happens.

Surely, the military has quite enough to do monitoring sexual abuses, harassment and coercion, not to mention the dicier terrain of co-warriors and lovers, without chasing down every outed affair.

What an odd state of, um, affairs for a peacetime army. I wonder what would have happened in the Make Love Not War days if young Americans had only known that infidelity was a way to get out of the Army.

Serbia's President Regains Currency

Jonathan C. Randal
In Belgrade

SERBIA'S resurgent President Slobodan Milosevic, buoyed by an injection of hard currency and the collapse of his main democratic opposition, seems assured of remaining in power despite economic hard times and the bitter legacy of the Bosnian civil war.

With his improved political standing, Milosevic has confounded critics who only months ago predicted he would be hounded from office by a devastating economic slump — caused in large measure by international sanctions — and the rise of a democratic opposition cheered on by the United States and other Western countries.

But since then, Milosevic's government has sold off what some here call "the family silver" — a 49 percent share of the state telecommunications monopoly. The bargain basement price, $907 million, paid by Italian and Greek telecommunications companies, reflected the high risks attached to doing business with Serbia and Milosevic's need to pay overdue wages and retirement benefits in an election year. The low price was offset by the terms: Eighty percent was paid immediately in desperately needed cash.

The sale was announced as his dominant Socialist Party of Serbia formally backed his bid to become president of Yugoslavia, which includes Serbia and Montenegro, instead of Serbia alone. That bid was dictated by Serbia's constitution, which bars a third term for Milosevic after his present administration ends in December.

The Serbian leader tipped his hand in March by moving trusted lieutenants into key federal posts to lend power and prestige to what had become a purely ceremonial post since the breakup of the six-republic federation in 1991.

But in a signal that Milosevic has not recovered all his former clout, Yugoslavia's increasingly hostile junior partner, Montenegro, snubbed his request for endorsement and for a constitutional amendment allowing direct election of the federal president. The president currently is chosen by the two federal legislative chambers.

Montenegro's president, Momir Bulatovic, is a Milosevic ally. But neither he nor Milosevic's other beleaguered allies in Montenegro dared accept the amendment, widely seen there as a way to give the post new powers for Milosevic.

The divided main board of Montenegro's ruling Democratic Party of Socialists last week postponed its decision on the issue for almost two weeks. The hesitation was interpreted as refusal to surrender the 600,000 Montenegrins' only major instrument of leverage with more than 9 million Serbs and with the dominant Serbian government.

The timing of the delay emphasized the growing strength of Milosevic's nemesis, Montenegro's popular Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic. For months, he has thwarted the Serbian president's persistent efforts to remove him from the government and party.

Djukanovic said in February, "It would be politically crazy for Milosevic to remain in any political position in the political life of Yugoslavia." But in recent days he has limited his criticism to boasting that "Montenegro has enough institutional power to oppose Milosevic's absolutist rule."

Djukanovic's apparent change of heart reflected an implosion of the Together opposition coalition. That coalition fell to personal quarreling after nearly three months of daily demonstrations forced Milosevic to restore Together's municipal election victories, which he refused to recognize last November.

The incessant bickering has damaged the presidential ambitions of one of Together's three leaders, Vuk Draskovic. It has also undercut once-pervasive hopes for greater democratization in Serbian political life — hopes engendered by Together's impressive public support last winter.

Barring a grass-roots upheaval — something that has occurred rarely in Serbian history — Milosevic thus seems unchallenged. Diplomats pointed to recent opinion polls indicating he remains Serbia's most popular politician despite having presided over the country's disastrous decline.

In a country where per-capita gross domestic product stands at about $1,600 — barely half the level in 1989, before Milosevic launched the country on the now-abandoned warpath for Greater Serbia — the telecommunications sale was hailed as a miracle, albeit a costly one.

The independent weekly Vreme contended that Belgrade collected only a third as much proportionally as the Czech Republic received in privatizing its telephone system.

But Milosevic's hands are so tied that he is in no position to drive hard bargains. With the United States and the European Union maintaining sanctions thwarting Yugoslavia's access to international financial institutions, specialists speculate that Milosevic would like to sell other state-owned assets to foreign bidders to raise cash.

Unemployment is approaching 50 percent, and the often-bountiful wheat and corn harvest is uncertain because of a cold spring and insufficient seed, fertilizer and diesel fuel. Farmers are still smarting because they were not paid fully for last year's crop. Health staffers, teachers and some industrial workers are on strike for back wages, and retired workers are in the streets demanding three months' worth of overdue benefits.

Zoran Jelicic, an independent economic journalist, puts those unpaid obligations at more than $1 billion, not counting wages owed the army, police and civil servants.

● An American proposal to consider sending a paramilitary force into Bosnia to hunt down war criminals has been blocked by fierce opposition from NATO military commanders worried about the dangers of reprisals by local militias, U.S. and European officials said.

A meeting of NATO defense ministers was expected to broach the idea of sending a "sheriff's posse" to Bosnia in the near future to seize some of the most prominent figures indicted on war crimes charges. But the apprehension of military chiefs appear to have shoved the idea to the sidelines.

Military Suspected in Burma Riots

R. Jeffrey Smith in Mandalay

THIS dusty, languorous city was roiled last March, when a peaceful gathering of several thousand monks airing grievances about botched government repairs of an immense golden Buddha turned into a two-evening spasm of violence and vandalism directed against local Muslims.

The mayhem was meant partly as revenge for the reported rape of a Buddhist girl, and it left in its wake at least one death, many injuries and considerable property damage.

Establishing the cause of a disturbance such as the riots of March 16-17 is a major challenge in Burma, an isolated nation ruled by a xenophobic military government that rigidly controls the news media, rarely holds open court trials and represses public dissent.

But one possibly telling detail about the riots here has seeped into the accounts of citizens and Western diplomats stationed in Burma — that some of the supposed monks who joined in the vandalism at mosques were wearing army boots and carrying cellular telephones.

This has helped sustain a common suspicion here that Burmese military forces played a role in provoking or carrying out some of the anti-Muslim attacks. The further suspicion is that they did so partly to preserve the idea that only a strong authoritarian hand can keep a lid on the ethnic and religious tensions supposedly boiling below the surface of this outwardly placid society.

Although Burma is overwhelmingly Buddhist — and Buddhism is a central element of the culture — roughly 4 percent of the 48 million population is Muslim and 4 percent is Christian. In addition, the country harbors at least 15 major ethnic groups, many of which have long battled the central government and each other.

According to several diplomats, military leaders typically have dealt with dissent or outbreaks of public violence with crushing "scorched earth" techniques. Ne Win, the general who controlled Burma officially until 1988 and evidently still retains influence with his military successors, began his rule in 1962 by dynamiting the student union at the University of Rangoon, a historic meeting place for dissidents.

Ne Win also ordered his troops — who make up a land army second in size to Vietnam's in Southeast Asia — to fire directly into crowds protesting economic problems and military rule in 1988. Some student protest leaders' heads were severed. Because monks had played a role in those protests, the military orchestrated a purge of Buddhist clergy in the early 1990s and today has seeded senior Buddhist ranks with spies, according to several diplomats.

The military junta, which calls itself the State Law and Order Restoration Council, has imprisoned hundreds of political dissidents without trial, including some who allegedly are being held in a corner of the walled palace compound in central Mandalay that was built by King Mindon Min in 1857. In the last few weeks, the junta detained more than 300 members of the chief opposition party to block a meeting in Rangoon.

Disappearances and "extrajudicial killings" of political dissidents are also orchestrated periodically by the military, according to the most recent State Department report on human rights here.

When the latest protests erupted in Mandalay, the nation's second largest city and its seat of power in ancient times, the military responded at first by deploying troops with automatic weapons throughout the city and ordering a tight evening curfew.

On the second evening, some of the troops fired over the heads of the rioters and the ricocheting bullets killed at least one monk, according to sources here. Annual proficiency tests for monks were canceled by the government and many were ordered home from local monasteries.

That monks participated in such a riot seems bizarre to a casual observer. The Buddhist faith here promotes compassion and nonviolence, and virtually all males spend time in monasteries as an adolescent rite of passage, when they supposedly are imbued with values that promote peaceful resolution of all grievances.

But local sources say many of those who wear a monk's garb are not serious students of the religion. They add that in this instance a long tradition of political activism and even violence by some senior monks carried over to some younger monks. "Anything could happen here, anything at all," said a Burmese businessman whose clientele includes some senior military leaders. "Things get out of hand quickly here, once there is a spark," said a Western diplomat about Burmese politics.

According to several local sources, the spark that prompted the March riots was a cry from someone in a crowd of monks at the Mahamuni Pagoda at the edge of the city that a local Muslim man had raped a Buddhist woman and gone unpunished.

The assault actually had occurred several weeks earlier, may have fallen short of a rape, and apparently was resolved satisfactorily by members of the families involved, according to several local sources. But, after hearing about the crime in a mob, an angry group of young monks stormed from the pagoda to exact revenge on more than a dozen mosques in the downtown area, where they smashed windows, destroyed furniture and burned copies of the Koran.

The government blamed the episode on "elements" that wanted to embarrass Burma in the neighboring Muslim capitals of Indonesia and Malaysia, with the aim of blocking Burma's planned admission this year to the Association of South East Asian Nations, a regional economic and political bloc. But few details about the episode have appeared in the Burmese media, a circumstance that has helped spread rumor and focus suspicion on the leadership.

"People here are willing to believe anything" negative about the military rulers, because they are so widely despised, said a resident.

Russian Poachers Threaten Caviar Trade

Lee Hockstader in Astrakhan

HIS MOUTHFUL of gold teeth arrayed in a broad grin, Vova stepped over the carcasses of his latest catch — four glistening Caspian Sea sturgeon, armor-plated, freshly gutted and still writhing in the grass.

"The river feeds us!" Vova enthused, as heedless of the twitchings of the giant fish as he is of the death throes of Russia's once mighty caviar industry, a massacre to which he was contributing.

Using a filthy plastic tub, his friend Genya set about straining, rinsing and salting the sturgeons' yield, 25 pounds of pearly black caviar. The half-hour procedure in their trash-strewed back yard will net Vova and his friends a delicious dinner and maybe $200 once they sell the roe to smugglers. At the most fashionable purveyors of fine foods in New York, Paris or London, this caviar might fetch $13,000 — or double that when it comes from even rarer white sturgeon called beluga.

Here amid the shabby, mosquito-infested villages in southern Russia's Volga River delta, 700 miles southeast of Moscow, it is the peak of the sturgeon spawning season, a six-week spring free-for-all during which legal fishermen, Russian border guards and police armed with assault rifles compete with a small army of poachers like Vova. Their quarry is caviar, one of the world's costliest items and most prized foodstuffs.

It's hard to say who's winning the caviar wars. By all indications, the big losers are the sturgeon — and the wealthy caviar lovers from Japan to Georgetown willing to pay up to $2,500 for a kilogram of the finest.

The Caspian, an inland body of salt water that is home to 90 percent of the world's sturgeon, is surrounded by Iran, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan at the southern end, Kazakstan and Russia in the north. Here on the Russian shore, where most of the sturgeon are found, the sea is overfished, fouled by pollution and threatened by oil exploration. Experts say Russia's caviar industry, the largest in the world, may collapse within five years.

It already is shriveling at an alarming rate. The industry presents a case study of how the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russia's rusting levers of state control and the sudden impoverishment of workers are having some unexpected and undesirable results with international consequences.

"If nothing changes and the planned development of oil goes forward, then in two or three years there won't be enough sturgeon to sustain a fishing industry," said Vladimir Ivanov, director of the Caspian Fisheries Research Institute in Astrakhan, the regional capital. "There won't be enough even for poachers. And extinction is a possibility in 10 years or so."

In the West, the dwindling stocks of Caspian sturgeon have driven caviar prices up by more than 35 percent in three years, making an already exorbitantly expensive item unaffordable to all but a few.

During the Soviet era, the production of caviar — as of everything else — was a state monopoly, so tightly controlled that statistics on annual output were an official secret. Poaching was rare, quality control strict and not even the most discriminating gourmet doubted that the taste of Russian caviar was superb.

But even then, the sturgeon of the Caspian were at risk. Beginning in the 1960s, Soviet factories along the Volga River pumped vast amounts of pollutants into its water, oblivious of the consequences for the fish who swam as much as 1,500 miles upriver to lay their eggs. Dams also blocked the sturgeon from reaching spawning grounds they had used since the time of the dinosaurs. By the late 1980s, the sturgeon population was in a nose dive.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, a long-standing agreement between the Soviets and Iran not to overfish the Caspian collapsed. And as poverty and industrial stagnation spread through the Caspian region, many people saw sturgeon as a kind of instant currency.

The drastic increase in poaching has cut the official sturgeon catch in the Caspian Sea from 25,000 tons a year in the mid-1980s to just 3,400 tons last year, and reduced caviar production by more than 80 percent in the same period, according to government figures.

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
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Going for the Gonzo

Steven Moore

THE PROUD HIGHWAY
Saga of a Desperate
Southern Gentleman
By Hunter S. Thompson
Edited by Douglas Brinkley
Villard. 683pp. $29.95

THE SUBTITLE must be a joke: Born in Louisville, Kentucky, Hunter S. Thompson may be Southern, but he's no gentleman. In fact, I'm not even sure I'd call him civilized. But I would call him one of the greatest American writers of the 20th century, both for his vibrant prose style and his career-long autopsy reports on the death of the American Dream.

His work is uneven, but at his best he shares with Mark Twain and William Gaddis a sense of outrage that expresses itself through virulent satire. His rock 'n' roll lifestyle obscures the fact he is essentially a moralist and a patriot, attacking shame and corruption with the vehemence of a biblical prophet. (The Book of Revelation is one of his favorite books.) To live outside the law you must be honest, and Thompson's iconoclastic honesty covers a multitude of sins. Perhaps he is a gentleman after all, in the sense that the Prince of Darkness is a gentleman.

The other subtitle for this book is "The Fear and Loathing Letters, Volume I." The first of a projected three-volume series, it includes about 200 letters written between 1956, when Thompson was 19, and 1967, the year he published his groundbreaking book Hell's Angels. What is immediately apparent from these letters is that Thompson is a born writer, not only by the ease with which he handles the language at an early age but because of his strong sense of vocation. Despite a reckless youth, he was a voracious reader and knew he wanted to be a professional writer from high school onwards.

The letters tell the story of his desperate struggle to support himself while forging a writing career. Unable to hold a conventional job — at a newspaper or elsewhere — he became a freelancer at an early age, writing colorful features for a variety of newspapers and magazines while enduring every form of poverty. But his real apprenticeship was in the writing of these letters, where he was free to work out the aesthetics of what would later be called his "gonzo" journalism. Some of his letters take the form of outrageous fictions, others are pranks (like his letters to President Johnson applying for the governorship of American Samoa); and others detail his objections to and frustrations with conventional journalism.

Finding the appropriate vessel for his writing talent is one of the main themes of this collection. He originally planned to be a novelist — the F. Scott Fitzgerald of his time, he boasted — but had to support himself with journalism because he couldn't sell his fiction. He wrote two novels in his twenties; the excerpts from them that were eventually published in Thompson's 1980 miscellany Songs Of The Doomed show that conventional fiction was as unsuited to his talents as conventional journalism. A weird hybrid of the two, he sensed, was needed: well-researched nonfiction enlivened by fiction techniques and filtered through an outrageous narrative persona. Hell's Angels was a step in the right direction, but he realized he needed to go further. Near the end of The Proud Highway Thompson tells a correspondent: "I feel experimental these days. Something new is wanted . . . Gross libel and madness. I'm getting bored with straight writing." A few years later Thompson would stumble upon the formula he had been searching for in "The Kentucky Derby Is Decadent and Depraved," and then hit the mother lode with Fear And Loathing In Las Vegas. That book was recently added to the revamped Modern Library — this isn't your father's Modern Library — and can now be seen as the culmination of one of the longest and strangest literary apprenticeships in modern literature.

Those who know Thompson only from his Fear And Loathing books or, worse, from his caricature as Uncle Duke in Garry Trudeau's "Doonesbury" are in for a jolt here. The seriousness of Thompson's quest is hammered home by the emotional climax of The Proud Highway: the assassination of President Kennedy on November 22, 1963. Thompson was devastated, almost reduced to tears, and the two letters he wrote that day sputter with hurt and indignation: "It is the triumph of lunacy, of rottenness, the dirtiest hour in our time . . . It is the death of reason."

Filled with new outrage, Thompson has a new sense of his mission: "No matter what, today is the end of an era. No more fair play. From now on it is dirty pool and judo in the clinches. The savage nuts have shattered the great myth of American decency. They can count me in — I feel ready for a dirty game." And those who know Thompson's more hallucinogenic prose should consider this eloquent plea:

His iconoclastic honesty covers a multitude of sins

"If we cannot produce a generation of journalists — or even a good handful — who care enough about our world and our future to make journalism the great literature it can be, then 'professionally oriented programs' are a waste of time. Without at least a hard core of articulate men, convinced that journalism today is perhaps the best means of interpreting and thereby preserving what little progress we have made toward freedom and self-respect over the years, without that tough-minded elite in our press, dedicated to concepts that are sensed and quietly understood, rather than learned in schools — without these men we might as well toss in the towel and admit that ours is a society too interested in comic strips and TV to consider revolution until it bangs on our front door in the dead of some quiet night when our guard is finally down and we no longer kid ourselves about being the bearers of a great and decent dream."

True to his word, Thompson made journalism the great literature it can be, F. Scott Fitzgerald of our time, as brilliant a chronicler of our age as Fitzgerald was of his. The Proud Highway is a great book by a great American, in that Thompson exemplifies the fierce individuality and love for democratic ideals that used to define an American. This is his best book in years.



ILLUSTRATION BY JILL KARLA SCHWARZ

That Serpent of Old Nile

Gary Jennings

THE MEMOIRS OF CLEOPATRA
By Margaret George
St. Martin's. 964pp. $27.95

THREE CENTURIES ago, Blaise Pascal suggested that, if Cleopatra's nose had been shorter, the whole face of the world would now be different. More recently, various Afrocentric groups have presumptuously tried to claim that Cleopatra was in fact a black woman — ridiculous; her family was originally Macedonian Greek.

The reader is bound to find the early pages of this novel somewhat confusing. Because of the paucity of family and given names at that time, there are some half-a-dozen female Cleopatras and male Ptolemies for us to sort out, as they engage in palace intrigues, conspiracies and cabals. However, as the extraneous ones gradually get disposed of by one means or another, "our" Cleopatra eventually comes to the fore, and the bulk of the story is hers.

A thrilling story it is, and we develop considerable sympathy for her successes, trials and tribulations, but I can't say that she ever becomes really lovable. George seems to have been at least subtly influenced by Elizabeth Taylor's portrayal of the character — beautiful, artful, ambitious, by turns flirtatious minx, temptress, seductress, murderess, competent queen, towering intellect (at one point, she learns to read and speak Latin fluently in a month; I would call that impossible) but unfortunately with not a trace of a sense of humor.

Though Cleopatra is technically — in the Egyptian tradition — "married" to one and another of her Ptolemy brothers, she saves her virginity for Julius Caesar — albeit he is 52 years old, balding, epileptic and has innumerable other "alternative wives," not to mention his genuine and long-suffering spouse, Calpurnia. Caesar is clearly the one true love of Cleopatra's life and, for us readers, the most engaging character in the novel. As well he should be; he gave Rome an empire that extended from Britain through Gaul, Spain, Italy, Greece, Cyprus and Crete to the shores of the Levant. His writings were famous in their time and are still widely quoted. He gave the Western world its first really workable calendar. After his death, the Romans elevated him to godhood and renamed one of their months for him.

George adheres to some of the old legends — Cleopatra introducing herself to the otherwise unapproachable Caesar by rolling herself inside a gift carpet, her bathing in asses' milk — and even makes them believable. The author also has the courage to correct some other old legends. Toward the end of the novel, Cleopatra does not wanly and vaporishly commit suicide by clasping an asp to her bosom. Instead, she realistically employs the far more lethal royal hooded cobra.

Anyway, Caesar is immediately smitten with her and whisks her off to Rome for a two-year stay as his acknowledged mistress. His subjects have never seemed to mind his other peccadilloes, but they mightily resent Cleopatra. She is "foreign," so she is shunned by both high society and the common folk, forced to live rather forlornly, ignored in one of Caesar's villas. On her arrival at Rome — and Rome at that period was a boondocks compared to her own urbane and sophisticated Alexandria — Caesar takes her on a tour of the place: Old and New Forums, the Circus Maximus, temples to this and that god.

Whenever Cleopatra is logistically able to be "on the scene," so to speak, the author does an admirable job of evoking the place, the times, the local life: chariot races, gladiatorial contests, triumphal parades, voluptuous feasts and the like. However, Cleopatra can seldom accompany Caesar or her own generals on their many wars and campaigns of conquest, so these must be pallidly conveyed to her (and us) by way of conversations, gossip, dispatches and letters. Even Caesar's assassination has to be handled the same way (no "Et tu, Brute!").

Cleopatra's memoirs are prissily modest and not at all titillating

Because many of the wars, civil wars and provincial uprisings employ the age-old military "hurry up and wait" technique, there are fallow patches where the opponents may sit simply glowering at each other for a year or so. But George superbly unearths, recreates or invents anecdotes, dialogues and adventures to fill in the gaps. Still, we do not get to experience the day-to-day horror of warfare until the culminating (and Egypt-crushing) four-month Battle of Actium, when Cleopatra insists on being at least a figurehead commander and sails there in her famous flagship: gilded inside and out, purple-sailed, silver-oared, festooned with fancy lanterns.

The author's research is awesome; she seems to know every detail of the foods, costumes and customs of Egypt, Rome and their colonies. She even includes a plausible explanation of the Jews' much earlier "parting of the waters" of the Reed (not Red) Sea. She does, however, sometimes fudge on details we might like to know more about. People are forever lighting oil lamps in dark rooms or torches in dark streets, as casually as if they were flicking their Bics. How did they do it? Curiously, too, for all her notorious love life, Cleopatra's memoirs are prissily modest and not at all titillating about her sexual encounters. He "made love to me" is about as sexy as it gets.

The novel fairly weeps with betrayals. Though the aging Caesar is ecstatic when Cleopatra bears him a son, Caesarion, he never publicly acknowledges the child as his own. And, after Caesar's death, his will makes no mention of or provision for Caesarion. Caesar's whole fortune and the succession to the governance of Rome are bequeathed to his extremely unlikeable nephew Octavian and that one's odious wife, Fulvia. For her part, Cleopatra is already prepared to find a replacement for Caesar, if necessary. While he still lives and "makes love" to her, she is casting admiring sidewise glances at the muscular virility of young Marc Antony.

In the final analysis, whatever the length of her nose, Cleopatra actually had little participation in all the epochal events of those years. They simply happen to have happened during her lifetime, and her chief distinction was being the focus of the Romans' hatred, for her having "unmanned" (or certainly "unRomaned") first Caesar, then Antony. Caesar's own death, not hers, was far more significant in changing "the whole face of the world." All that her suicide accomplished was an end to the Ptolemaic dynasty and the diminution of Egypt from a world power and cultural center to the status of a mere "breadbasket" province of Rome. Yet it is she, dead at 39, still beautiful, who has most entranced us down all the centuries since. Her "memoirs" are vivid and enthralling. Read them.

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
June 22 1997

World's poor lose out to corporations

Victoria Brittain and Larry Elliott

RAPID technological change and globalisation are transforming the world economy at an unprecedented pace, but the benefits are going to the rich and strong rather than the weak and poor, according to the United Nations.

Despite claims that free trade and free movement of capital would benefit all nations through a process of global "trickle-down", the UN's latest Human Development Report found the gap between wealthy and poor growing ever larger.

The report says that free global markets have been applied selectively, with the West driving through reforms that help its exporters and financiers but being resistant to changes in agriculture and textiles that would benefit the developing world. "Lacking power, poor countries and poor people too often find their interests neglected and undermined," it says.

The share of world trade for the 48 least developed nations — representing 10 per cent of the world's population — has halved, to just 0.3 per cent, in the past 20 years.

The report uses the broader criteria of "human poverty", rather than simply "income poverty", taking into account the factors measured in the Human Development Index, such as illiteracy and short life expectancy which add up to lack of choices and capabilities, not just income. Canada has the highest HDI rating in the world, while Britain ranks 15th.

"Globalisation has its winners and losers. With the expansion of trade and foreign investment, developing countries have seen the gaps among themselves widen. Meanwhile in many industrial countries, unemployment has soared to levels not seen since the 1930s, and income inequality to levels not recorded since the last century."

Among the losers are the 1.3 billion people living on a dollar a day or less, the 160 million malnourished children, the one-fifth of the world's population not expected to live beyond 40, and the 100 million people in the West who are living below the poverty line.

The biggest globalisation winners have been multinational corporations. A list of the 100 largest economies in the world would show that half of them are nation states and the other half corporations. The 350 largest corporations at present account for some 40 per cent of global trade.

According to the UN, globalisation is being presented "with an air of inevitability and overwhelming conviction. Not since the heyday of free trade in the 19th century has economic theory elicited such widespread certainty." The UN says much of this optimism is misplaced.

The report puts forward a six-point programme for promoting growth that benefits the poor:

- People-centred policies to give individuals, households and communities better access to economic, social, political, environmental and personal assets.
- Work towards gender equality.
- A minimum target of per capita income growth of 3 per cent in 100 poor countries.
- Improving the management of globalisation through better trade policies, fairer rules and fair terms for poor countries to enter markets.
- Creating a political environment so that poor people and poor communities can be heard rather than suppressed and oppressed.
- Special action to prevent countries sliding back into poverty, including peace-building efforts and debt relief.

Put into context, the UN puts the cost of eradicating poverty at 1 per cent of global income. Effective debt relief for the 20 poorest countries would be even cheaper, with a price tag of $5.5 billion — the cost of building Disneyland Paris.

The Human Development Report is published by Oxford University Press.

Double standards on a matter of life or debt

Andrew Simms calls on the new UK government to live up to its promises about Third World loan reduction

"HE THAT dies pays all debts," wrote Shakespeare. For too many people in the world's poorest countries, death will indeed be the only way out: one person is born every second into bad, unpayable debt.

Yet it need not be ever thus, say United Nations agencies. Unicef calculates that a few million pounds of debt reduction in sub-Saharan Africa would save the lives of hundreds of thousands of children and thousands of women in childbirth.

Highly indebted countries such as Tanzania, where less than half the population has access to safe water, are crying out for relief. Over the next four years, Ethiopia, where the average person only expects to live to the age of 47, will pay more than $1 billion in debt service. The country spends four times as much on debt servicing as on health.

Tony Blair, who is to attend his first Group of Seven plus Russia meeting of the world's richest countries this week, said before the election: "International debt reduction will be a top priority. We want the benefits of debt reduction to be invested directly in reducing poverty." Now is his chance.

FOREIGN EXCHANGES

	Sterling rates June 17	Sterling rates June 9
Australia	2.1869-2.1897	2.1455-2.1480
Austria	19.92-19.95	19.64-19.65
Belgium	58.41-58.49	57.58-57.66
Canada	2.2620-2.2642	2.2648-2.2667
Denmark	10.78-10.79	10.62-10.63
France	9.55-9.55	9.43-9.43
Germany	2.8318-2.8351	2.7907-2.7932
Hong Kong	12.67-12.68	12.65-12.65
Ireland	1.0781-1.0806	1.0802-1.0822
Italy	2,779-2,783	2,756-2,758
Japan	185.75-186.00	184.13-184.38
Netherlands	3.1855-3.1883	3.1395-3.1428
New Zealand	2.3712-2.3744	2.3647-2.3683
Norway	11.94-11.95	11.62-11.62
Portugal	285.71-286.05	282.65-282.95
Spain	239.23-239.42	236.25-236.53
Sweden	12.71-12.73	12.66-12.66
Switzerland	2.3671-2.3602	2.3481-2.3504
USA	1.6378-1.6388	1.6338-1.6346
ECU	1.4506-1.4523	1.4338-1.4370

FTSE100 Share Index down 38.0 at 4748.1. FTSE 250 Index down 10.0 at 4557.1. Gold down $0.35 at $341.35.

The efforts of the former chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, led to last year's G7 meeting being dubbed by the host, Jacques Chirac, "a landmark in the history of international finance, symbolised by efforts made by industrial countries to resolve the problems of their poorer counterparts". But one year on, not a single country has benefited financially from the new deal on debt relief agreed later in Washington.

The process was tainted by political power play and held up by the delaying tactics of creditors, including Germany, Japan and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

To stop the human suffering caused by debt, two things are essential: a one-off cancellation of the backlog of unpayable debt by 2000; and a proper plan to avoid the further build-up of unpayable debt. Debt relief is a cheap and practical way to help poor countries. History gives us ample evidence of double standards being operated by those holding up the process.

After the second world war, Germany, which objects to generous treatment for indebted poor countries, enjoyed debt relief it would be unlikely to qualify for today. Japan, another objector, also benefited from generous treatment.

Two hundred years ago Adam Smith called for "fair, open and avowed proceedings" to tackle the debts of states. Like dealing with debts of individuals, these were, "least dishonourable to the debtor, and least hurtful to the creditor". John Maynard Keynes wrote in The German Transfer Problem in 1929: "The majority of the countries which were heavy borrowers abroad during the 19th century frequently escaped from it by defaulting more or less."

Today, no such escape is to be had. To qualify for relief, countries undergo years of imposed policies leading to austerity and hardship.

Double standards do not stop there. Banks treat companies that run up huge debts with kid gloves for fear of losing investments. Eurotunnel froze payments on a debt of $13 billion in 1995. This dwarfs the cost of current proposals for the poorest countries. Eurodisney, now Disneyland Paris, incurred losses of $1.4 billion in two years. Their understanding treatment by the banks makes the likely relief for poor countries before 2000 seem paltry.

Even if the current proposal, the Highly Indebted Poor Country Initiative (HIPC), were fully implemented now, it would be cheap. The HIPC, applied today without the extra years of financial pain it demands of weak economies, would cost: about a sixth of Britain's annual military expenditure; what the United States spent on going to the cinema in 1995; or what British people spent on chocolate last year. So where's the problem?

Critics say debt relief will create a "moral hazard", the favoured excuse of the IMF. Poor countries, they claim, will be tempted to borrow recklessly. But the real immorality comes when countries have to ask "must we starve our children to pay our debts?", in the words of the former Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere. The creditors have escaped responsibility for too long.

As was recently exposed, the IMF, despite warnings from its own staff in the early eighties, kept lending money to Mobutu's regime in Zaire. Now the population will pay for the "sins of the fathers".

No government is perfect, and fair ways must be found to ensure the benefits of debt relief are invested in poverty reduction. But other arguments are easily shot down. Some say it undermines a country's credit worthiness. This is a classic Catch 22 because we know that while countries remain heavily indebted, they find it hard to attract investment. Both cannot be true.

The poorest countries, mostly in Africa, are losing out in world trade and in attracting investment. Economies burdened by unpayable debts are not reliable investments, yet with declining aid, the need for long-term investment is vital. Debt relief is the way forward.

Why is it so slow? Could it be a desire to maintain leverage over poor countries, or just a desire for a steady stream of service payments? Apart from the reservations of Germany and Japan, one reason can be found in the words of an official of the US's CitiBank, involved in lending in the eighties: "Let's be clear. Nobody's debts are going to be repaid . . . Paying back isn't really the issue. The issue is the borrower remaining creditworthy and able to carry the debt, but not to repay it."

Most people thought the Third World debt crisis had disappeared. But it has quietly been growing to record highs. This led to last September's HIPC deal.

So what is wrong with HIPC? It is too slow. Tanzania, very poor and with massive debts, will not get help until 2003 at the earliest. The qualifying criteria are harsh and arbitrary and not based on meeting human needs, merely on a country's estimated success in world trade.

The IMF's research department admits that the forecasts on which judgments are made "are not particularly accurate". The process is also secretive and unaccountable. Unlike in commercial and municipal debt proceedings, poor countries are not properly represented when their debts and need for relief are assessed.

Three members of the new UK Cabinet — Robin Cook, Clare Short and Margaret Beckett — have spoken about the need for a more ethical foreign policy. We are holding our breath to see whether the prime minister will live up to his promise.

Andrew Simms is co-author of One Every Second, published by Christian Aid and the World Development Movement

A modest proposal (#1,498)...

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When the write stuff goes wrong

David Cohen stumbles through the pearls of academic prose submitted to the third annual Bad Writing Contest

BRITISH academics did not rate as prominently as their American counterparts in a contest to find the English-speaking world's most toe-curling examples of bad scholarly writing. But that was not for lack of trying, said one of the judges in the third annual Bad Writing Contest.

The work of five Americans featured in the search for the worst current examples of academic prose published by established scholars. Two British academics were merely listed in contrast to last time's convincing win by an Oxford don in the competition sponsored by the journal Philosophy and Literature, which is published by Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. The competition might be the closest that academia has come to its own printed version of Pseuds Corner.

"We certainly found that there is more of this type of material currently being produced in America than the UK, particularly in their departments of cultural and media studies," said the journal's editor, Denis Dutton, a senior lecturer in the philosophy of art at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand.

"On a per capita basis, though, that's probably what you'd reasonably expect." Sadly, he said, the best British institutions this year remained resistant to the trend toward gibberish, though this was not universally the case. "The demise of English departments in England is indeed evident," mused the United States-born academic. Like cricket, he said, "it may well be that the purity of English will in future years be kept by the Indians or the Jamaicans."

Dr Dutton said he and other editors had looked for outstanding examples of "the ugliest, most stylistically awful passages to be found anywhere in a scholarly book or article". Parodies were not accepted as entries in a field "where unintended self-parody is so widespread".

More than 70 submissions were received by way of email and through Phil-Lit, an Internet discussion group.

The overall winner was Frederic Jameson, an English professor at Duke University, in Durham, North Carolina, whose passage originally appeared in the opening page of his book Signatures Of The Visible (Routledge): "The visual is essentially pornographic, which is to say that it has its end in rapt, mindless fascination; thinking about its attributes becomes an adjunct to that, if it is unwilling to betray its object; while the most austere films necessarily draw their energy from the attempt to repress their own excess (rather than from the more thankless effort to discipline the viewer)."

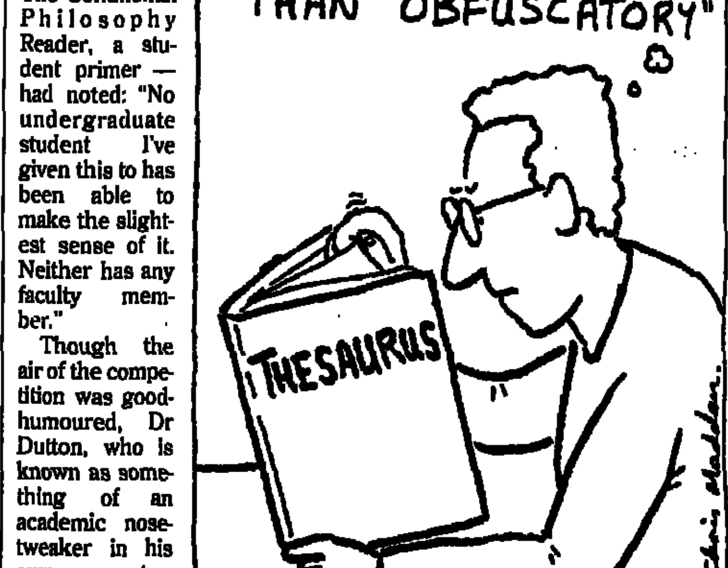
Second place went to Rob Wilson from the University of Hawaii at Manoa for a recent passage from The Administration Of Aesthetics: Censorship, Political Criticism and the Public Sphere (University of Minnesota).

In his book, Dr Wilson wrote: "If such a sublime cyborg would insinuate the future as post-Fordist subject, his palpably masochistic locations as ecstatic agent of the sublime superstate need to be decoded as the 'now-all-but-unreadable DNA' of a fast deindustrializing Detroit, just as his Robocop-like strategy of carceral negotiation and street control remains the tirelessly American one of inflicting regeneration through violence upon the racially heteroglossic wilds and others of the inner-city."

That bad academic writing need not be prolix was demonstrated to the judges by Frederick Botting, an English professor at the University of Lancaster, who scored third for a sentence from a critique of Frankenstein: "The lure of imaginary totality is momentarily frozen before the dialectic of desire hastens on within symbolic chains."

Dr Dutton also cited an entry from a British academic, Richard Kearney. Dr Kearney, of University College, Dublin, wrote: "Since thought is seen to be 'rhizomatic' rather than 'arboreal', the movement of differentiation and becoming is already imbued with its own positive trajectory."

The Australian professor who had submitted Dr Kearney's line for consideration — it originally appeared in The Continental Philosophy Reader, a student primer — had noted: "No undergraduate student I've given this to has been able to make the slightest sense of it. Neither has any faculty member."



Though the air of the competition was good-humoured, Dr Dutton, who is known as something of an academic nose-tweaker in his own country, said it carried its serious points — not least that many English departments appeared to be succumbing to the same types of show-off terminology once associated with sociology.

"There's an underlying importance here," he said. "It was our view that too many scholars are guilty of wilful intimidation when it comes to their readers, of using jargon as a form of posturing and power play."

But are things really so much worse today than they were a generation ago? "There have always been academics guilty of bad writing," he said. "But I'd have to say that gibberish is more widely written today than at any time since the physicians of the Middle Ages."

Dr Dutton might just as well have quoted the words of another (American) from this year's chosen crop: "To this end, I must underline the phallicism endemic to the dialectics of penetration routinely deployed in descriptions of pictorial space and the operations of spectatorship."

Entries for next year's Bad Writing Contest may be sent by email to Dr Dutton at: d.dutton@fina.canterbury.ac.nz
The closing date is December 31

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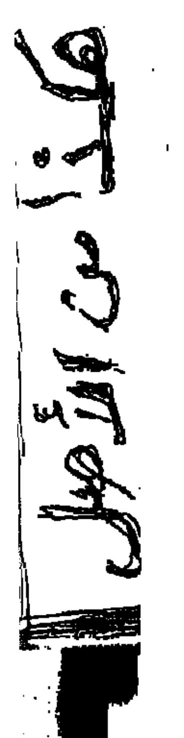


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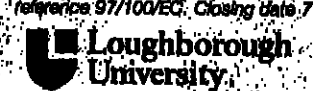
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Terminal justice

Duncan Campbell on an IT revolution in court



Bench mark: Judge Ito with his laptop during the OJ Simpson trial

LAWYERS may soon be invited to put away their pens as well as their wigs, as the information technology revolution sweeps into the courts. It has been a slow process so far, but those who drag their gowns and try to cling to traditionally slow (but profitable) methods now face a formidable foe in the form of Britain's new top judges. Computerising the whole process of litigation — involving Net links and Web sites, e-mail and video-linked virtual courts — is now at the top of the legal agenda.

Although most of this technology is already mature, it is sparsely used. The most famous computerised case so far was the O J Simpson murder trial (remember Judge Ito, whose laptop was more prominent than his gavel). Real-time transcription was also used in the Scott Inquiry and the Maxwell fraud trial; it is currently in use in the North Wales child abuse inquiry and about 10 other current trials or inquiries.

This month the British government announced that former Treasury chief Sir Peter Middleton had been called in to cost the far-reaching "Access to Justice" reforms proposed last year by Lord Woolf.

Now promoted to the number two judicial job as Master of the Rolls, Lord Woolf is unshakeable about the central importance of IT to his plans for making justice faster, cheaper and fairer: "Quite apart from my reforms, this progress has to happen . . . [and] the sooner the better."

Later this month, the Lord Chief Justice, another recent appointee, will receive evidence about a straightforward but vital IT improvement already being used in a handful of British trials. Lord Bingham and his colleague Lord Justice Saville will be reviewing the latest system for real-time transcription, in which the laborious, slow, clumsy, inaccurate and costly process of having everyone in court write down what witnesses say in longhand is replaced by computer-aided transcription (CAT), in which every word spoken appears on monitor screens within two to three seconds.

Like Lord Woolf, Lord Justice Saville is an enthusiast for the rapid introduction of IT. Earlier this year, he made British judicial history in a landmark Court of Appeal verdict by directing that it be posted immediately to the World Wide Web.

"There are cases now within the system which we could not manage satisfactorily [without CAT]," says Lord Woolf. "It would not be possible to dispose of them otherwise."

ADVANCED CAT technology allows users to define "issues" that come up in a case. Issues can be pre-determined before trial, but the real value of these systems lies in their flexibility. As the course of a trial changes what matters, so users can add, alter, modify or delete the "issues" at will. The programs give everyone a personal list of top topics, which can be changed as often as desired.

If issues and evidence transcripts are systematically encoded, closing speeches and summaries virtually write themselves. To have a summary of the evidence on an issue requires no more than a click of the mouse.

Yet the true benefit of CAT to litigation and justice is not that lawyers can cease scribbling, but that the full power of modern IT can immediately be harnessed. Evidence can automatically be indexed, searched and retrieved, alongside critical documents. The two most advanced systems, LiveNote (www.smithbernal.com) and Transcript Analyser (www.sellersimago.com), have sophisticated full text search systems. Has a word of name been mentioned before? It need only be typed in to review every occurrence.

Among lawyers, few but the judges seem to have an inkling of what IT will soon be delivering. Lord Woolf is not surprised that his brethren on the bench are leading the IT revolution. "They are more concerned and interested in it than the Bar or the solicitors' side of the profession," he says, because it is the judge's job to manage cases and limit time spent wastefully. The present system of solicitors' remuneration awards them more "billable hours" the longer a case takes.

The High Court in London already offers a little-known video hook-up service, whereby minor "interlocutory" hearings can take place without lawyers leaving their offices. But this innovation has had a "very slow takeup", says Lord Woolf, as "country solicitors" have preferred to travel to London rather than use IT. And with a jaunt to town adding to the billable hours their client pays for, there is little incentive to move to modern methods? When CAT systems start to be connected to the Net and can run on in-court local area networks (both likely to be available this year), Experts, lawyers or analysts will be able to join or advise on a trial from anywhere in the globe.

This process could be extended. Smith Bernal Reporting, which manufactures LiveNote, would like to open up the trials the system covers live to the Web. But this could be going too far too fast, according to Lord Woolf. Live public Net access might have the same effect as live courtroom TV in producing what British judges see as "unacceptable pressure on witnesses".

Fast and furious

So what makes women angry? **Maureen Freely** on road rage and PMS

WHAT do women want? Freud asked. He had no idea how much flak he'd get for that posthumously, but the experts who follow in his footsteps do, so they approach the black hole that is femininity with greater caution. The preferred question today is: what makes women so angry? Last week two exciting reports shed light on the mystery. The first was from Australia, where a study by psychologists found women claiming to suffer from pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS) were really suffering from the same mood swings and difficulties at work as their control groups — one made up of women who did not claim to have PMS, the other of men. They concluded that PMS did not exist and any woman claiming otherwise was experiencing "random depression *or* irritability caused by social *or* health problems". (My italics.)

The second report came from Lisa Dorn, member of the British parliamentary advisory council on transport safety, who told the Sunday Times that tests (when? why? where?) show women experience more rage in cars than men do. We are more likely to be tired when driving and to be surprised by the antics of other drivers; we experience higher levels of stress and anger. She attributes this to our "multiple roles in society".

I would like to know if we are more stressed by male or female drivers, and whose antics most surprise us. I would also appreciate hard data on the link between our multiple roles in society and the way we use the horn. What riles me most, though, is that I can't dismiss either the PMS study or these authorless road rage tests as entirely without basis: there is too much evidence out there to refute me.

Happily, I have been wise enough to do my most lawless venting of random depression or health-related irritation on total strangers. I was careful not to give my name to carloads of thugs who followed me to East London after I flashed them on the motorway just outside Oxford, or to the motorcyclist who ran me off the road after I failed to get off the fast lane of the motorway fast enough. Still, I think it is misleading to lump my kind of ugly behaviour with the sort that ends in injury or death. If anyone was running a risk of injury, it was me.

I see much the same type of blurring in discussions of PMS. I have no idea whether I suffer from this syndrome, but I do have a problem with any article in which the absence of physical symptoms is interpreted as meaning it's all in our heads.

I once had a boyfriend who blamed everything he didn't like about me on my hormones. That's what he said: it's all in your head. There I'd be, trying to find out how much he'd lost at poker or struggling for a tactful way of suggesting he shouldn't accept the 19th whisky if he was driving home, and there he'd be, asking if it was the time of the month. The amazing thing is that more men who ask this don't get murdered.

Why are they still asking it? You'd think by now people would have stopped trying to dismiss women as irrational and learned to think of them as political instead of menstrual animals. But the higher up the ladder you go, the less possible this seems. A small but telling example: according to Private Eye, the Sunday Telegraph asked Germaine Greer to write about the implications of the new female MPs. "The angle we're interested in," the commissioning editor was quoted as saying, "is that women in groups tend to have synchronised menstrual cycles."

Now, I have no way of knowing if this story is true, but when I think back to the sour-faced woman who refused to give way on the single-track road when I went to collect my daughter from school just now, it occurs to me that we might both have been randomly depressed, socially irritated and surprised by each other's antics because we had been reading the same articles.

With TV barons interested in business, not culture, **Nicholas Fraser** argues that a nation bored with Lite TV will switch off

A new moronism

A FRIEND in the United States used to call me with instances of the New Moronism — the fatuity and/or vacuity of contemporary media. I suspect that he nursed the fantasy that one day he would find the perfectly empty moment of television.

He told me about Lite TV, a California news bulletin destined for the reality-averse or merely Prozac-stuffed. But then he introduced me to the principle of irony. Did we hate what we were watching? Did we despise it? It didn't appear to matter. If those who created television, or made money out of it, were able to live easily with the idea of its awfulness, why should we care?

"You're aware of the irony of using television to criticise the medium," says Sideshow Sam, a character in The Simpsons. A recent episode of the cartoon series featured the entrapment of Homer on grounds of sexual harassment by venal TV hacks. It was moving as well as funny, and it testified to a hatred and fear of the medium. Believe the highbrow mob, and hawks or vultures are already circling the corpse of TV. "If we don't get television, television will get us," a character says in the film Quiz Show.

Even Umberto Eco, philosopher of "hyperreality" and erstwhile fan of mass media, thinks that television has lost its gloss. "It's like sex or food," he told me. "There's far too much of it. And the impulse to create good is no incentive to make good things when you can make bad ones."

Among the British TV establishment, too, the quality of talk about the medium has altered — and for the worse. Gone are the days when Hugh Greene, former director general of the BBC, or Jeremy Isaacs, Channel 4's former chief executive, could speak of a "community" of producers concerned with the public good. Instead one can find abuse heaped weekly in the Sunday Times by A A Gill on the "Tristrams" who presume to think that serious programmes were ever worth making or watching — or be content with the platitudes of brandspeak.

John Naughton, writing in the Observer, explained that he and the people he knew had gone off the box. They were spending more time with the Internet and watching less television. He attributed this to a decline in quality — and to the end of television as a mass medium, watched simultaneously by entire populations. "Broadcast television is dying of its own accord," he said. "Or, more precisely, it is being sidelined by social and technological forces which it cannot control."

However, this isn't the conventional view of television, which is supposed to be enjoying a miraculous extension of its powers. At the twice-yearly TV market in Cannes this spring were buyers, sellers and innumerable well-dressed *assistantes*. Canal Plus was launching its first 30 channel European digital bouquet and the BBC was selling programmes in vast quantities. The profuse real-life plants at the Discovery channel stand surrounded a hyperreal baby elephant executed in rubber, waving its trunk and trumpeting every 30 seconds in the direction of harassed executives touting dinosaur CD Roms.

In medialand things are changing very rapidly. Three years ago the US dominated the markets, but US TV has by now been "globalised" — its familiar forms have been first exported and then copied throughout the world. There is a world media culture now and it consists predominantly of reach-me-down Americana — takings from the great home mass media swamp.

When they are not entranced by its commercial possibilities, Americans are divided over this new aspect of their latter-day hegemony — they either find it harmless or they are alarmed by what they see as the violence beamed by satellite TV into places that have lost the power or the will to defend themselves. "It's become terrible," a beleaguered print editor in New York told me. "You have the idea that this is all there is, really all. That's quite frightening."

Of course, in "real" (ie, media) life, it isn't so simple. Television is so huge and so pervasive that we no longer pretend to understand its effects. Is it any more possible to have a point of view in relation to a medium that so comprehensively envelopes our waking hours? In 1968 there were only three channels in Britain, and Mick Jagger, appearing in the current BBC director general John Birt's famous tyro World In Action, could refer to the existence of a "media monopoly". But satellite and digital technology have wrenched apart these old structures. Now there are international companies whose power stretches through time zones around the globe. Many of the old companies have been taken over, and familiar names like the BBC are now shrunk, rating as only middle-rank powers.

One can see the new giants as robber barons — but comparisons with old-style state broadcasters or press magnates are misleading. For a start they don't like to be seen influencing governments (the change in Rupert Murdoch, from government-busting potentate to born-again Christian is interesting). They are prepared to trade with each other, spinning alliances like huge cocoons. They have no lasting political loyalties and no real beliefs. As Murdoch's junking of BBC news on his China service demonstrates, if pressed they will certainly fail adequately to stand up for traditional freedoms. They are not in the business of doing good deeds, or preserving what remains of our public, national cultures.

In the global market, information, like entertainment, has become a commodity

In return the new giants do offer distraction. They are professionally concerned with the nature of our private acts of consumption. Since the satellite revolution, picking up speed with the end of the cold war, we have witnessed a huge culture shift. We now have a global market, in which everything can be sold. Information, like entertainment, has become a commodity — but so have television journalists, whose practice, whatever they like to think, is now best understood as an extension of showbusiness.

Instead of "truth", producers now contend with each other to supply what Marcel Ophuls called "totalitarian schlock" — heavily fictionalised narrative versions of reality owing little or nothing to their real-life origins.

Does it matter when a film doesn't tell the truth about a historical event? Not terribly: the various half-truths implied in such tags as "inside this" or "the real that" are by now freely acknowledged. With the new technology, it is easier year by year to depict surfaces convincingly — and this is leading to a re-definition of what is "real". Television is scraping ceaselessly at the surface of the world in search of dolphins, Elvis sightings, gruesome sex change operations. It endlessly reproduces frauds posing as reality, or vice versa.

But the most dramatic shift in attitude concerns the current willingness to concede that "quality" is for rich people and trash is for the masses. This is a US attitude of long standing but it is becoming evident, too, in Europe, where it is now usual for executives to insist on the poor quality (and lucrativeness) of their product. In the US, traditional broadcasting is known as "free TV".

"Look, I wouldn't watch it," a mogul said to me, about his network's output. "Of course free TV is terrible — it's for poor people, not you and me."

Media temptations are legion, and taking a stance against information itself requires a masochistic streak. So there are many joiners — people like a Canadian producer friend of mine, who spent 15 years watching the annihilation of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and is pleased at last to be making money. Such people do tend to put their faith in the Internet. It will usher in utopia sooner or later, and it can be relied on to repair the damage done by the collapse of TV.

But there are also hard-core refuseniks such as John Tusa (former BBC World Service head, now running the Barbican Centre). He believes that it is too late and that places like the BBC have wrongly espoused the values of the market. For Tusa the sell-out of broadcasting represents an irreversible alteration for the worse in the quality of our information — and one which people have failed to understand. Can one have a society at all in which all communication is reduced to commercial messages? Tusa *et al* think not, but they are also certain that this state of affairs will shortly come to pass.

Like many prophets, I think they are right to be warning us — and not just because the quality of many programmes has declined. If you except such as CNN, the experience of TV viewing has significantly deteriorated with the arrival of so many channels. So much dross makes the interesting or provocative harder to find — and it increasingly comes in the outer space of post-midnight. Filtering is an exhausting activity, as schedulers have understood; all of us tend to fall back on the familiar, which is what we only half want to watch, and tolerate grudgingly.

In many depressing ways, the common currency of TV is being steadily debased. It's a place where, less and less, important things appear to occur. If they do, we tend to have missed them by squandering our time — by struggling with the new British Telecom/Murdoch 136-channel bouquet, for instance. With greater "choice" we'll inevitably miss more until the experience of TV consists, paradoxically, of what we didn't or couldn't see as well as who we could have missed. For many people, who have better things to do with their leisure, this is already the case.

But the worst hasn't yet come to pass. For the past decade and a half proponents of the remaining public possibilities of TV have had to dress their convictions in the prevailing parched idiom of utilitarian managerialism. That was the only way for public broadcasting to survive — but these days are over. To their credit the Tories left more or less intact both Channel 4 and the BBC — "anachronistic" though these may seem beside the growing digital dominance of Murdoch, which they also condoned. Deciding not to privatise Channel 4 is an early good deed of the new British Heritage Secretary, but, like the BBC, it should be given as much freedom as possible and encouraged to find its own way. Neither should be hampered from operating in the new world on the perverse grounds that they are competing unfairly with their private rivals. Neither should be punished for doing their job.

For the most interesting aspect of these enormous changes is that we don't know how they will work out. As yet we have no real idea whether the Internet will remain open and chaotic, a global equivalent of the hopes once sustained by Channel 4, or (as seems probable) develop into a series of separate, half-closed systems from which smart operators will finally begin to make money.

It would be crazy to predict the future of broadcast television. Perhaps we shall be able to receive increasing quantities of pay-per-view material. In the end we may well be dialling up everything, from the equivalent of newspapers to feature films and banking or shopping services. However "convergence", beloved though it is by media consultants, is a long way off. It shouldn't be grounds for any current decisions about the shape of broadcasting. It certainly shouldn't lead us to give up on the idea that there still things — remarkable events like the recent British general election, as well as the funerals of elderly members of the royal family — that people will want to watch in common.

Not all serious TV is highbrow. Programmes such as The Simpsons use the media to criticise the media

But what about British TV as a whole? Is it really on the way down? My viewing habits tell me that while bits of the centre are holding up, other places are doing less well. I do take comfort from the persistent unsuccess of Live TV's News Bunny, but no one can regard the netting of the bewhiskered Michael of Kent as an ITV presenter as auguring well for information culture. Meanwhile the pressures — they are not directly caused by ratings, or marketing, but the anticipation of these factors — grow greater each year. The real contribution of Britain to world media is the savvy mixing of low and high forms. In the sixties, Robert Hughes chaired a BBC quiz show in which experts had to identify a picture after being shown a fragment. "There wasn't a rigid division between television and high culture," Hughes recalled. "They didn't think in terms of debasement or enhancement."

New media barons have no lasting political loyalties and no real beliefs

It is possible that producers will ultimately cease to want to make serious or good programmes. This will happen not because no one watches them — they do sometimes get audiences — but because we lose the habit of paying good money and, just as important, of appreciating them. It comes down to a belief in taste, with the implication that some things are better than others. We have a truly TV-educated public in Britain now, with the highest expectations. They will stop watching only if they become bored with so much rubbish.

If we do end up with The Unbearable Lightness of Media, it will be the result, above all, of lack of imagination.

Nicholas Fraser is editor of BBC's Fine Cut. This is a personal view

Trophy trade a licence to kill

There is big money to be made from endangered species — legally or illegally. **Paul Brown** reports

BATTLE HAS been raging at the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites) conference — which began in Harare, Zimbabwe, last week — over the future of the elephant, rhino, whale and a number of other species less familiar but which also have bones, tusks, hair or skins that makes them valuable for the human hunter.

Environmental groups that have held the line against trade in endangered species are dismayed at the advance of the "Wise Use" or "Sustainable Use" movement.

Wise use means that the only way to conserve wildlife is to make animals and birds sufficiently valuable so that the locals who share their habitat want to keep a stock of them alive. This "use" varies from shooting them for trophies, medicines, or jewellery — or, in the best case, just for the pleasure of looking at them.

Some environment groups, such as the World Wide Fund for Nature, have embraced some of these arguments. Most of their effort is based on getting the locals in Africa to benefit from eco-tourism.

Villagers, who may in the past have been glad to see the back of large species that trample their crops or compete for land, are persuaded to have second thoughts. If they can have a greater gain from keeping the poachers at bay by milking rich tourists, then the trophy animals have a better chance of survival.

All this can work, but the "Wise Use" movement is formed of the traders in endangered species. Most, if not all, the real money is made where the bits end up, in Hong Kong or Japan, and not in the country where the now long-dead animal once lived.

Japan gets a special mention because it heads the list of importers of animal parts. Of the 135 nations meeting at Cites, Japan is the most forceful in wanting to restart trade.

The convention has a system of classifying animals on to Appendix 1, in which all trade is banned, and Appendix 2, where restricted trade is permitted. Japan wants to move some whales, rhinos, elephants and the hawksbill turtle from Cuba from Appendix 1 on to Appendix 2. In each case, Japan is the recipient nation of the valuable bits.

It was revealed recently that Japan has been using its aid programme liberally among the half-dozen tiny nations in the Eastern Caribbean to secure a block vote at Cites in favour of this downlisting policy. It is a tactic Japan has already successfully used at the International Whaling Commission's annual meetings to block further protection of whales and dolphins.

It has also been revealed during the conference that whale meat being sold in Japan in the last year comes from humpback, fin and Bryde's whales. All these whales are protected, but the meat was being sold as minke — supposedly caught as part of Japan's scientific whaling programme in the Antarctic and the Pacific. Japan will no doubt claim that this was a rare case of accidental by-catch, but this would re remarkable if it were true.

Another example of what can go wrong in the international trading system in animal parts comes from South America. The vicuña, a relative of the llama, inhabits the central Andes in Peru, Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Ecuador. It has very valuable wool, and many were shot and sheared before the vicuña was given protection by Cites.

In 1987, the vicuña was downlisted to Appendix 2 in order to start a limited trade from Peru and Bolivia. The important point was that the animals were captured, sheared and released, and the wool was woven locally, so the full value of the product went to the country of origin. This programme allowed an effective system of non-lethal exploitation, while allowing the numbers of animals to recover.

In 1994, the system was changed to allow Peru and Bolivia to export raw wool, including a stockpile that had been confiscated from poachers. It was impossible to distinguish legally obtained wool from poachers' wool, and the result was a massive increase in poaching — more than 9,000 animals were shot and shaved in Peru in the first two years. Argentina now wants to get in on the act and trade in raw wool. If it gets its way, things look bleak for the vicuña and it will rapidly be back on the endangered list.

The basic argument from the International Fund for Animal Welfare and the more fundamentalist wing of the environment movement is that from Japan and the rest of Asia, through Africa and South America, there is no effective way of policing the trade in wildlife. One dead tusk resembles another. Any trade in unfinished animal products is a licence to poach.

The only way round it is to make the finished item in the country of origin. This, of course, does not suit the "Wise Use" lobby — or the traders of Japan.

Have a gas on the road

THE GAS powered vehicle is about to take a great leap forward on British roads, _writes Paul Brown_. It is a technology that has been around for 100 years but its moment has arrived. Increasing pollution and the ready availability of this cheap alternative fuel are about to change the market. The new British Labour government's promised Transport White Paper, its clampdown on inner city pollution, and its emphasis on clean technology must be music to the ears of gas car salesmen.

There are many hurdles to get over, not least the lack of readily available supplies of the new fuels, but there is no doubt that the technology works, and the pollution from gas car emissions is tiny compared with petrol and diesel. But the industry is grimly aware that repeated attempts to get alternative fuels off the ground have been made — and all of them have foundered.

Kenneth Clarke, in one of his last acts as Chancellor in the Conservative government, dropped the price of gas to 32c a litre below that of petrol. This suits bus, lorry and van fleets that have their own specially built vehicles and supplies, but there is not a production gas car available in Britain until October, when Volvo is due to launch an as yet unnamed model.

The only way to drive on gas at the moment is to have an expensive conversion, which costs almost as much as buying a new small car.

But while there are only 1,000 liquified petroleum gas-powered (LPG) vehicles in Britain, there are 450,000 in the Netherlands and more than a million in Italy. Natural gas is fast catching up with 300,000 in Italy and 400,000 in Argentina.

LPG is a product of the oil industry, and so supplies are linked with the petrol and diesel markets. Natural gas is altogether a more worrying rival from the oil company point of view, and potentially easier to get off the ground in Britain.

The main reason is that the technology exists to fill a car from the domestic gas supply. British Gas can provide a compressor (current price tag, $3,200) so the car fills up overnight. It means never having to visit a petrol station again, and adding fuel bills to the domestic gas bill. The snag is that the compressor has a meter, so British Gas charge you the fuel tax on the gas. For business enterprises with several vehicles, the cheaper tax on gas is already beginning to make this viable.

A boost to both fuels, and incidentally electric vehicles, has come this month from the Energy Saving Trust, which is putting nearly $100 million into projects to convert vehicles to these cleaner fuels.

A mass market for cars is only likely to follow when a Labour Chancellor drops the price of gas even further and enough gas outlets are provided in garages to make a national network viable. It may sound difficult, but it's not so long since a mass market for unleaded petrol seemed like a pipe dream.

Rumbling appendix

Jan Rocha reports from São Paulo on another logging controversy in the Amazon rainforest

THE WARNINGS by environmentalists about Amazon deforestation and the threat posed by the rapacious timber trade have always been downplayed by the Brazilian government. So the leak of a report from the government's own intelligence agency, the Secretariat for Strategic Affairs (SAE), confirming everything the green lobby has always said, must have been a huge embarrassment, especially when the government is still reluctant to see mahogany included on Appendix 2 as an endangered species at the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites) in Zimbabwe. Brazil is a major mahogany exporter, and Britain's main supplier.

The SAE report, obtained by the newspaper O Liberal, admitted that 80 per cent of the 60 million cubic metres of timber extracted every year from the Brazilian Amazon comes from illegal sources.

"This information demonstrates that the Brazilian government does not have any control over logging activities in the Amazon," said Garo Atmanian, executive director of the World Wildlife Fund in Brazil.

"A substantial part of the timber operation is illegal, predatory, and involves waste of 60-70 per cent. Concern with sustainability is almost non-existent." There is also little economic return for the local population.

The report reveals that logging companies — despite their use of illegally obtained timber, much of it from indigenous reserves — enjoy a variety of tax breaks under the government programme to stimulate development. Among them are 22 foreign-owned companies, mostly with Asian capital.

Trunk road . . . a mighty mahogany tree starts its journey in Rondonia, Brazil PHOTOGRAPH: MARCUS SANTILLI

Brazil's opposition to the inclusion of mahogany on Appendix 2 has been further undermined by the change of heart by the world's top importer, the United States, and top exporter, Bolivia, who previously opposed inclusion but now say they will support it. Traditionally, Latin American countries vote together in such forums.

For Eduardo Martins, head of Ibama, the government environment agency, the US change of heart has more to do with trade than tree-hugging. "Brazil has taken steps to protect its mahogany, which is not in danger of extinction . . . the US [wants to] use the convention to determine the rules of trade," he says.

Mr Martins claims that Brazil has been working with neighbouring countries to reach a common position, which would include technical co-operation and sustainable development standards.

All this means that, just as the mahogany issue is being discussed in Harare, the Brazilian position remains unclear. The picture is further complicated by a report that Brazil has been putting pressure on Malaysia to vote against inclusion.

But if it cannot stop mahogany being included, then the aim will be to ensure that the regulations are as flexible as possible, says João Carlos Capobiamco, of ISA, the socio-environmental institute that is a leading non-governmental organisation.

The need for controls on the Amazon timber trade is recognised not only by the green lobby but by at least two of the major British mahogany importers in correspondence sent to environmental organisations.

Brazil's market share as the fifth highest world timber exporter is expected to grow as logging of Asia's tropical forest nears saturation. A Friends of the Earth report concluded that the Asian companies now moving into the Amazon are not interested in immediate logging but in "testing the commercial, political and administrative climate to develop larger operations over the coming decade".

The protection, however incomplete, offered mahogany by inclusion in Appendix 2 would at least be a warning that the companies will not have it all their own way in a country where excellent environmental laws exist, but are all too often ignored for reasons of political expediency or sabotage by corrupt officials.

Genes v Genesis

Steve Jones takes issue with the determined ignorance of creationists

THIS MONTH, an Australian judge intervened in a matter of belief. In the creation versus evolution debate, he took the side of the angels. Ian Plimer, a Melbourne geologist, faces huge costs for taking creationism to court — and losing. The case seems distant and the subject irrelevant. It is, though, essential.

Dr Allen Roberts, a fundamentalist with a degree in Christian Education from Florida's Freedom University, was seeking funds to excavate Noah's Ark, recently found in eastern Turkey. Although his claim annoys Biblical literalists, who insist that it must be some miles away on Mount Ararat (not to speak of the predictable plaints of science that the object is a rock and not a boat), Dr Roberts was keen to dig it up. Mr Plimer claimed that Dr. Roberts had misled his backers and was hence breaking the Fair Trading Act. He lost, and may go bankrupt.

The Bench's lofty judgment was that "Some issues — no matter how great the passions they arouse — are more appropriately dealt with outside the courtroom." Well, fine: except that the law cannot simply duck the clash between science and belief. Genetic engineering, human cloning, abortion — all deserve their day in court.

California's civil code states: "Everything is deemed possible except that which is impossible in the nature of things." The Institute of Creation Research sued the state — and won — for the right to grant degrees. Legal edicts on the scientific nature of things go back a long way. In 1920s America, 50 pieces of legislation tried to stop the teaching of evolution. All failed. The believers are still trying to affirm their right to tell lies to children.

Many biologists are concerned that such determined ignorance is winning. Admittedly, half of all newspaper editors in the United States disagree that "dinosaurs and humans lived contemporaneously" — but what about the others?

It is easy to see creationism's manoeuvres for what they are: a debasement of both science and religion. They have, though, an odd resonance with the newer controversy. When does a fertilised egg become human? This month's ban on human cloning (admittedly one with some carefully crafted loopholes) by President Bill Clinton's committee shows what happens when science and belief overlap. He has taken the fundamentalist position. Perhaps, though, he should learn from creationism about the limits of what science can say.

The theory of evolution is simple. It is "descent with modification" (which is exactly what cloning — descent without modification — is not). Parents produce offspring different from themselves, the differences are inherited and, inevitably, over the generations, life changes. Sometimes, evolution has a direction. A few of the altered lines of descent are better at copying themselves and, in time, they prevail. That is what natural selection is about, and that, in the end, is why we are all here.

Fundamentalists, however, believe in — even preach — every part of the theory, without noticing. This is for one simple and terrible reason: the US has lived through an episode that has, with astonishing speed, laid bare the evolutionary arguments. The creature involved was unknown to Darwin. It is HIV, the Aids virus.

Even to creationists, Aids is proof of descent with modification because they can see it happening. The disease has changed in its 30-year history. How it did so retraces the past: the viruses of US patients are more similar to each other than are those from, say, those in Kenya. Even in a single body the virus changes as the illness progresses. What is more, the HIV virus adapts by natural selection to overcome new treatments as they appear, which is why drugs do not generally work. Darwin would have been delighted. Fundamentalists are happy to use his mechanism to illusrate the wrath of God, but not the evolution of mankind.

Their problem comes because they overstate the limits of science. Unlike in the US (where humourless literalism holds sway), the failure of creationism in Britain came because Christians were happy to define man as becoming human with the emergence of a soul that leaves no fossils. No scientist could hope to identify it.

The debate about human cloning turns on the same moral issue. When does the embryo gain a soul? For fundamentalists (and for Mr Clinton) the answer is simple and apparently scientific: it forms when sperm meets egg.

Naturally, the law is concerned with the rights of the unborn. Commissions have been much appointed. Most involve scientists, some eminent. There is, though, an oddity. No evolutionist would discuss when evolving Homo became human by gaining its crucial spiritual dimension. It is simply not a scientific issue.

But biologists have been careless in their flirtations with theology, and biological research may now have to pay the price. There is much discussion of a new creature, the "pre-embryo" (I never saw it in my textbooks); and of the unnatural nature of cloned humans (my mother, as it happens, is an identical twin).

Why does anyone take them seriously? Certainly, science has a lot to say about when an embryo can survive outside the womb, or feel pain; but as to when it becomes human, forget it.

Both sides need to accept the boundaries of their own subject. For cloning (but not, alas, for creationism) there is still room for compromise. I once worked at the University of Botswana. Many of the students were keen creationists. Even so, my evolution lectures went down well, and the exam was a model of accurate regurgitation. How, I asked, did that fit with their beliefs? The answer was masterly: "It's simple, sir; you evolved, we were created!" If only those involved in the cloning debate were as open-minded. —*The Observer*

Steve Jones is Professor of Genetics at University College London

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Broad appeal

Paul Evans

AS SOON as we steered the aptly named High Hopes out of the boatyard and on to the River Yare it became obvious to my wife and I that we were the sort of idiots who should never be let loose in charge of a boat. However, within minutes the iridescent flash of a kingfisher promised so much of the wetlands ahead that we resolved to muddle along in our land-lubberish way and explore them.

The Norfolk Broads, a national park in all but name, is a complex of marshes and fens set around tidal rivers. There are more than 30 lakes, called Broads which, with the many rivers and inter-connecting channels, amount to more than 320km of navigable waterways.

It was long supposed that this was a natural landscape, but research in the 1950s revealed the Broads to be peat-diggings which were flooded by sea-level rise in the 13th century.

Water in the wetlands is controlled by pumping, once by windmills — many of which still stand — and now by electricity, into dykes and rivers. The degree of pumping determines the character of the landscape and whether it's grazing marsh or reed-fen. In some areas the level of the "land" is lower than the water level of the rivers and much of Broadland is below sea level. This wild, flat, watery landscape is the result of a centuries-old relationship between the marsh-dwellers and nature.

As we puttered along the southern section, on the rivers Yare, Waveney and Chet, Broadland revealed more and more of its mysterious character: the great expanse of reeds, enigmatic willow tangles and lush cattle-grazed, flower-rich meadows, all beneath huge towering skies.

This is a place of birds: haunted by herons, ringing with the burbling songs of reed and sedge warblers and the stone-chinking call of bearded tits. Mallards and shelducks dabble and geese and swans sail. Overhead, quartering the reeds on wide V-shaped wings, the marsh harriers watch for food and then dive.



ILLUSTRATION: BARRY LARKING

Broadland is perhaps the largest protected wetland in Europe and holds populations of resident and migrant birds, otters, rare dragonflies and butterflies — all dependent on the complex mosaic of wetland plant communities. It is also a place visited by millions of people every year.

I had a strange feeling that the "Broads experience" was really an elaborate costume drama. These Broads, dressed in luxurious weeds, rippling floods and big skies, are very carefully controlled. There's a tricky management act going on, which aims to balance the protection of the landscape and its wildlife with the interests of local people and the huge influx of visitors. Although it feels timeless, Broadland is like a film set.

The luxury of remoteness ends just the other side of the riverbank. As trains beetle across the reedy landscape, the towns and villages they stop at show cracks where the "real world" seeps in. In the pretty village of Somerleyton, I found the post office closed. I was told: "It hasn't been open since last October." On the Suffolk coast, Lowestoft is desperately trying to transform itself from a depressed port into a depressed seaside resort. The main signpost in town points to the Samaritans — a sure sign of hard times.

The further into the marsh and away from "civilisation", the greater the sense of relief this contrived wilderness has to offer. And for us idiots messing about on boats, slipping away from willow-hung moorings into the morning river mist is one of the most peaceful experiences imaginable.

Chess Leonard Barden

GARRY KASPAROV wants a 10-game autumn rematch with IBM's super-computer Deep Blue, which so dramatically beat him recently, but will his world championship title be at stake? In the immediate depression after his crushing 19-move defeat in the final game, Kasparov offered to play a title series, but later he became more cautious, repeating his demands for access to DB's training games and for a different match sponsor as a condition for play. It may not matter: the reality is that if Kasparov loses to DB again in any longer match, his status will be badly damaged.

Anatoly Karpov, whose own projected million-dollar match with Kasparov looks unlikely to happen, has also challenged DB, while the International Chess Federation (Fide) president, Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, is expected to give the machine one of his wild-card invitations for the knock-out world championship, scheduled for December.

The problems, though, are only beginning for the Fide world body, which excludes computers, and games played against them, from its rating lists. If normal criteria were applied, Deep Blue would appear in Fide's July rankings with 2,775 points, straight into the world top four on the basis of its two matches with Kasparov. But many grandmasters fear for their living if computers are rated on the same basis as humans, and some years back Fide barred an all-computer team from playing in the biennial chess Olympiads.

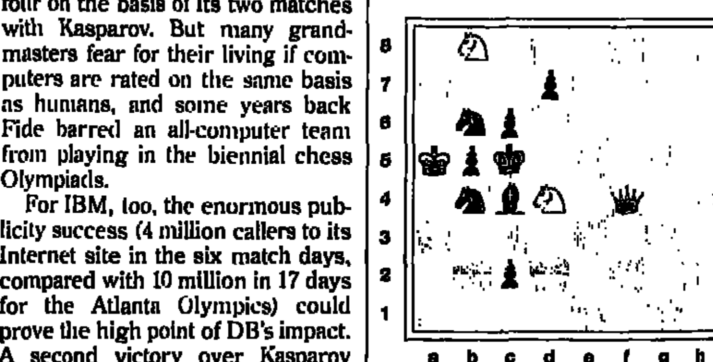
For IBM, too, the enormous publicity success (4 million callers to its Internet site in the six match days, compared with 10 million in 17 days for the Atlanta Olympics) could prove the high point of DB's impact. A second victory over Kasparov would not be such a stunning upset, while defeat — still the likely outcome against a fired-up and better prepared Russian — could drag the company into a messy series of returns and rematches.

Batsford has speedily published Kasparov v Deeper Blue, by Daniel King (£9.99), a full account of the moves, ambience and background to the match by the British grandmaster who was a match commentator in New York. It's a gripping read, both for serious chessplayers and for computer people.

The rush to publication shows: the cover speaks of Deeper Blue and the text of Deep Blue, and never explains the difference (Deeper was the pet name used by the programmers). King's comments are written game by game and, until the last two games, he's clearly expecting an easy Kasparov victory. Thus the final game is recounted like a death in the family ("He looked away from the board towards his mother . . . mumbled a few comments to her and shook his head. He looked as though he was about to burst into tears") and the book ends without a real summing-up, presumably to catch the publisher's deadline.

King has still written a very good analysis of the match, including Kasparov's resignation in a drawn position, his paranoid complaints that Deep Blue's programmers were overriding critical moves, and the strategies and tactics to watch out for when playing against a computer.

No 2477



White mates in two moves, against any defence (by T R Dawson, 1947).

No 2476: 1 . . . Ng5 2 Bxf7+ Nxf7 3 Re1+ Nc5 4 Nxe5 wins decisive material.

Quick crossword no. 371

Across

5 Diamond-shaped armorial tablet (9)
8 Brutal person (4)
9 One of the family (8)
10 Arbiter (6)
11 Flexible cement (6)
13 (Send) boat (into the water) (6)
15 It's easy (6)
16 Plot or affair (8)
18 Job (4)
19 Place for guests to sleep (5,4)

Down

1 "A bundle of nerves?" or a cyst (8)
2 Infrequent (6)
3 Badge or token (6)
4 Join together (with needles?) (4)
6,7 Left-winger with inappropriate life-style? (9,9)
12 Treasonable behaviour (8)
14 The flight from Mecca (6)
15 Dull and miserable (6)
17 Enough to hang oneself? (4)

Last week's solution

Bridge Zia Mahmood

THE European Championships have begun in Montecattini, in northern Italy. Of the two British teams competing, the Ladies have the better chance of gaining one of the top five places in their series. Nicola Smith and Pat Davies have been one of the best women's pairs in the world for many years, Sandra Landy renews her partnership with Michele Handley, and the current World Mixed Teams champions, Heather Dhondy of England and Liz McGowan of Scotland, complete the squad.

In last year's Olympiad, on the island of Rhodes, the British women started slowly, seemingly unable to score the big wins against inferior opposition. But they held their own against the stronger nations, then finished in tremendous style with a flurry of maximum or near-maximum victories.

The deal (above right) against Sweden features a well-known suit combination, but perhaps not as well known as it ought to have been by the Swedish declarer. Love all, dealer South:

North
♠ 6 3
♥ A 10 8 5
♦ K 8 6 4
♣ A Q 5

West
♠ J 10 8 4
♥ J 9 6 2
♦ 9 3
♣ J 6 2

East
♠ 9 5 2
♥ 7
♦ J 10 5 2
♣ 9 8 7 4 3

South
♠ A K Q 7
♥ K Q 4 3
♦ A Q 7
♣ K 10

South	West	North	East
S'strom	Smith	Gothe	Davies
2NT	Pass	3♦	Pass
3♥	Pass	3NT	Pass
4♣	Pass	4♦	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♥	Pass
7♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

This was well bid by Sweden, using their conventional system. Three diamonds was Stayman, 3NT was a slam try agreeing hearts, four clubs and four diamonds were cue bids, 4NT was Blackwood, and when North showed two aces, South bid the excellent grand slam. The British pair at the other table reached only six no trumps, so it was important that the defence could somehow induce seven hearts to fail.

Nicola Smith led the jack of spades, which Madeleine Swanstrom won with the ace. Declarer laid down the king of hearts — and Smith dropped the nine from the West seat! This is a vital play — if West does not drop the nine, South will next cash the queen, then pick up West's jack by a finesse. But when the nine falls, it is open to South to play West for the singleton, crossing to the ace of hearts next to finesse against East's jack.

Swanstrom led a low heart, and Smith followed suit. Now the Swedish declarer paused; realising that West's play of the nine is the "standard" false card in this position, Swanstrom was tempted to put in dummy's eight. But since this would mean going down if Smith had 92 or 962, she could not afford the risk. She went up with her ace, she went down in her slam, and Britain reached the quarter-finals at Sweden's expense. ©

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
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Letter from Eritrea Edmund Worsick

Plague in the Garden of Eden

IT'S STRANGE to think that man evolved from around here, that these eroded and dusty highlands were once richly forested, green and abundant — a Garden of Eden for our ancestors.

But there is something very biblical in the view over the town of Keren with its square, flat-roofed houses, bleached white in the sunlight.

Imagine a town full of these whitewashed houses, all clustered together for shade around a fort-topped mound, set in a bowl of mountains, rank upon rank of rocky peaks and ridges all shimmering in the afternoon heat. Imagine all that and you are looking at Keren, Eritrea's second largest town.

It's a shame that Jesus isn't around today, because there are enough crippled people to fill a Gospel or two with miracles. One miracle would be to remove the land-mines that make most of the peaks around impassable without the risk of losing a leg. Another would be to reforest the slopes that were cleared by the Ethiopians and now stand above the town like a lunar landscape of tumbled rocks and dust. Eritrea needs miracles as it struggles to build a country after its 30-year war of liberation against its most recent colonising power — Ethiopia.

Winning independence seemed impossible against successive regimes backed alternately by the United States and Russia, but winning the peace doesn't seem much easier. Eritrea, you see, is plagued.

A plague of aid organisations has recently been averted by the government, which has thrown out several non-governmental agencies that are not vital to Eritrea's development. But the ones that remain stand out, creaming off local talent with fat pay cheques, their representatives in 4-wheel drive Toyotas with logos painted on the doors — UNHCR, Unesco, USAid, Coopzione Italia — which stand out against the usual transport of camels, donkey carts, and Beetle-generation automobiles.

But there is still a plague of food aid: 60 per cent of the population depends on aid for survival. There is also the plague of ecological damage: so much deforestation and displacement due to war and drought that locals say the memory of water haunts the dried-up streams and riverbeds like a ghost.

And then there is the plague of population growth. Liberation has brought a baby-boom of potentially catastrophic proportions for a country that cannot feed, educate or offer employment to the people it already has. Forty-one per cent of Eritrea's population is under 16 years old. Seventeen per cent is under six. The government is trying to help, but it's up against its own people, religion, tradition and the need of parents to insure themselves against the future with children who will care for them.

Finally, there is the plague of war, both past and present. One million land-mines still litter the country. Piles of tanks, troop carriers, Jeeps and trucks have been gathered into huge graveyards of rusting ordinance, a sad and useless receipt for the billions of dollars spent to purchase them.

Despite being one of the poorest nations in the world, Eritrea still spends more on defence than on anything else. There have been shootouts with Yemen over some tiny islands in the Red Sea that may have oil. Sudanese agents regularly shoot at government cars — and more recently five Belgian tourists — in an effort to destabilise the country, while Eritrea is helping the Sudanese rebels to topple the Khartoum government.

After 30 years of war you could be mistaken for thinking that there's nothing left to win. Of more importance now is whether the Eritrean people will succeed in building a peaceful and stable country. They have faced terrible odds before and won — and with similar self-sacrifice maybe it can be done. But with the return of the rich, Westernised refugees from the US, Scandinavia, Germany and Britain — the "lucky" refugees — and the endless battle so many people have against poverty, is there the patience to keep striving for Eritrea?

People say: "Before there was an enemy. We were fighting. We didn't care. We would have given our lives. It was a revolution. Now it is different. Now it is work. We cannot keep fighting when there is no more enemy. Now we must think about ourselves."

For Eritrea it seems that winning a war only solves part of the problem; the real fight to construct the country begins after liberation

BA takes on colour

Keith Harper and Jonathan Glancey

BRITISH AIRWAYS last week made a $96 million switch from flying the flag to a global airline which "portrays the paintings" from throughout the world on the tailplanes of its 300 airliners.

Until last week, all BA planes carried the Union Jack style logo. In a move reflecting the fact that 60 per cent of its passengers are not British, BA has changed its corporate identity to feature "world images", colourful paintings and designs from, among others, Africa, Poland, China, and Canada, on the tails of its fleet.

The exceptions are BA's seven Concordes. A new Union Jack, based on that used by Nelson at Trafalgar, will flutter on their tails to support the company's contention that it is not turning its back on Britain's heritage, but is just trying to make the airline more global.

Ten aircraft already carry the new colours; one 747 has on its tailplane a painting by Emmly and Martha Masanabo of the Ndebele in South Africa.

Think locally, act globally. This is the message chanted like a mantra to international corporations by the sharpest and most forward-looking design studios and business communications experts over the past decade. Now, BA, a company with the most staid of images, has got in on the act.

Its striking corporate identity has been devised by the London-based design team Newell and Sorrell. Through the simple but effective idea of asking an international diversity of painters, sculptors, ceramicists, weavers, quilters, calligraphers and other artists to devise "local" design motifs for the tailplanes of BA's silver-grey and blue aircraft, Newell and Sorrell have given the airline warmth.

Until now, we had to think of BA as a polished organisation driven almost solely by the desire to appeal to besuited executives jetting from one important meeting to another.

Its previous corporate design originated in the United States and dated from the mid-1980s. It went hand-in-polyester glove with nannying stewardesses, tightly-crimped stewards, and acres of the sort of weave of carpet best suited to banks.



A British Airways jet, with Emmly (right) and Martha Masanabo of the Ndebele of South Africa, creators of the new image

What BA appears to have recognised is that, although its core market is the business executive, an increasing proportion of such travellers are now more casual, more colourful (in every way), and more internationally minded.

Equally, rivals such as Virgin have long mastered the art of treating passengers as equals no matter whether they look like IBM marketing executives or extras from a Quentin Tarantino bloodbath.

If some of the images culled from around the world by Newell and Sorrell are a little corny — tartan for the Highlands of Scotland (well, you would hardly expect an Irn Bru can, would you?), and a Nbedele mural for South Africa — the overall effect is a recognition of changing international values.

The next move, should BA be prepared to take it, is to improve the mumsy uniforms worn by its cabin staff, to revamp the office-style decor of the bulk of its fleet, and to force an air-change in the attitudes of cabin crew who are masters and mistresses of the patronising cliché.

Appearances go a long way, but to be truly likeable, as opposed to smooth and businesslike, BA needs a change of heart as well as corporate image. Only then will its purring captains and soothing first officers have Virgin's jumbos firmly in their sights.

Notes & Queries Joseph Harker

HOW much exercise is needed for an average person to gain a reasonable degree of fitness?

AN AVERAGE amount. — *Tim Adams, Noumea, New Caledonia*

FOR many years, sportsmen and women have been advised to exercise vigorously for at least 20 minutes, three times a week, to maintain and enhance their cardio-respiratory (or "aerobic") fitness.

Vigorous exercise is usually enough to leave you feeling out of breath and sweaty. But only 11 per cent of men and 4 per cent of women regularly take part in vigorous exercise. The good news is that, for the rest of us, more moderate physical activity can help to improve or maintain health significantly.

In 1994, the Health Education Authority recommended that adults should take part in at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity, at least five days per week, including simple things like brisk walking, some types of heavy housework, or climbing stairs. So your 30 minute total could be made up of two brisk walks, or a short cycle ride and a spot of gardening. — *Nick Cavill, Health Education Authority, London*

THE Royal Canadian Air Force developed a plan defining the number of times certain exercises should be completed within 11 minutes to attain "average fitness" according to age. It also defines fitness levels for aircrew (a much higher level). The beauty of the system is that one can start at any age, at any level of fitness, it requires only 11 minutes per day, and can be used by men or women. — *Richard Dennis, Freiburg, Germany*

WHAT became of Black, Asian and Arabic people in Nazi-occupied Europe during the war?

MILITARY expediency forced some strange twists in Nazi armed forces recruitment. Professor A J Gregor, in the introduction to his book, The Ideology Of Fascism, noted that one of the supreme ironies of the second world war was that by 1945 the "aryan" Waffen SS was among the most multi-racial armies in history, having within its ranks — to various degrees of horror from the Nazi hierarchy — black Africans and Americans, Arabs, Indians, various North African and central Asian peoples, and whole divisions of Slavic Russians and Poles. Think what a soul-destroying experience it would be for a modern neo-Nazi to be confronted by a black, South African SS veteran! — *Dave Merrett, Australia*

A NUMBER of mixed-race children were born during the occupation of the Rhineland by French troops after the first world war. About 40,000 black French soldiers are believed to have been based in Germany. There were also Africans from its former colonies, such as Cameroon, during the Nazi period.

In 1927, the commissioner for the Palatinate announced that considerable cause for concern would arise as these black children matured. He inquired whether it was possible to render them infertile. By 1937, 400 mandatory sterilisations of African-Germans had been recorded.

Some black people were used for propaganda purposes. Several died in concentration camps but those who survived were excluded from compensation payments. However, the Swiss embassy in London recently stated that black people who were victims of Nazi persecution may be eligible to benefit from the Special Fund for Victims of the Holocaust approved in February this year by the Swiss Federal Council. — *David Sparks, London*

Any answers?

HOW were telephone dialling codes allocated to countries — eg, 32 for Belgium, 33 for France, 44 for the UK? — *Dr G G Anderson, Brussels*

IS BEAUTY really in the eye of the beholder or can it be measured? — *William Barrett, London*

Answers should be e-mailed to weekly@guardian.co.uk, faxed to 0171/+44171-242-0985, or posted to The Guardian Weekly, 75 Farringdon Road, London EC1M 3HQ

Few have heard of her. Yet de Monchaux is being touted as the next Turner Prize winner. **Adrian Searle** reports

Holy mysteries

THIS IS weird. I'm sitting in a confessional at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in east London. Peering through the fearsome ornamental metal grille that bisects the room, I wonder what to confess, and to whom. I know art galleries are supposed to have taken the place of churches in the public consciousness, but this is going too far. It is a tricky, sweaty-palmed moment, so I run my hands over the red suede swirls of the bench, and notice that I'm sitting on what appears to be some kind of love-seat.

This little sanctuary is actually more like a pleasure dome or a fanciful summer-house than the title, Confessional, suggests. It is a Gothic gazebo with whited-out windows. A folly, built inside the further folly of Cathy de Monchaux's installation of sculptures. De Monchaux's show has turned the downstairs space at the Whitechapel into something between a church and a rumpus room. Everywhere I look, there are frightening insect-like corsetries, macabre intestinal whips, rows of labial pouches, puckered anal bulges, grasping metal claws.

The artist herself has as much difficulty pinning down her work as I do. Reproduced in the catalogue is a note she faxed to Kathy Acker — author of one of the essays — describing the works. "Seahorse-like thing with top section opened out to reveal brain-like red leather fruit-like thing," de Monchaux writes, helpfully, and "scar-like image . . . very beautiful . . . like the walls in the film Repulsion . . . pouches, vaginas, arses, pricks etc. in a sort of clasp made of brass and copper". And, again, "central section pink leather 'man-trap'. Implication that the floor could swallow you".

Being swallowed is the least of our problems. De Monchaux's works are immaculately crafted agglomerations of rubber, leather, suede, copper, brass, steel and glass; they're sewn, screwed, pleated, bolted and moulded. Be-ribboned, jewelled, pronged, sprawled, dangled and involuted. They are polymorphous, perverse, fetishistic, kinky, kitschy machines. (The editor has started complaining about my inventories, so I thought I'd better make this one worth the trouble.)

The least characteristic, and in some way simplest, work is also the best. Two rows of white, life-size, bronze-cast frogs hang by the neck from a scaffold of twigs, dangling on threads as though on a gamekeeper's gibbet. The hanged frogs have been given tiny erect human penises and balls, or bulging vulvas. All have gawping mouths and eyes blind in ecstasy or pain. When men are hanged, we are reminded, they get erections.

This macabre chorus line is a playful interlude in a show devoted to pleasure and death. Although de Monchaux's obsessive attention to detail makes you want to get close to the work, she makes us feel uncomfortable when we get there. We are in the lodge of a female, Sadean freemasonry, decorated with a backdrop of Victorian funerary goods.

De Monchaux's debased, hybrid aesthetic owes something to old Grateful Dead album sleeves, designs for the film Alien, to sci-fi paperback covers and cheesy computer games. The sculptures flirt with couture, steamy lingerie and top-of-the-range sex gimmicks. They'd fit nicely in the cult vampire novels of Anne Rice. They exude the kind of taste pomp-rock stars prefer. The kind of taste — as Harold Rosenberg said of Yves Klein — that keeps an ocelot for a pet. It's all laid on a bit thick, and it's all about excess. There's a light dusting of white powder over much of the work, as though Lady Bountiful has been making free with a million quid's worth of coke.



Cathy de Monchaux with one of her bizurre frogs PHOTO: PIPPA MATTHEWS

But de Monchaux is not just indulging in a bit of style-slumming. She means, as much as anybody can, what she does. She is also an art sophisticate, so when she engraves each and every one of her hand-written metal labels to the exhibits, we have to decide whether she's being overly precious, a total control freak, or trying to get us to see the show as a single, multi-part work.

De Monchaux's show has been installed within and around a specially built room in the centre of the gallery. As well as several entrances and exits, the room has narrow, floor-to-ceiling slits in the walls, allowing one to view a distant work through a gap in a nearer piece, aligning sight-lines of the work along the central axis of the gallery. This theatrical arrangement makes one think of a church, with its nave and rood-screen, side-aisles and chapels, and little reliquaries. And then, of course, there is the confession box.

The sculptor Susana Solano, who showed at the Whitechapel some years ago, had similar inclinations. She too was influenced by the imagery of Christianity, but to less overtly transgressive effect. Another Spanish sculptor, Cristina Iglesias, who this month opened a show at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, also plays games with ornamental surfaces, overabundant detail, architecture and the body. The Belgian artist Lili Dujourie, now at London's Lisson Gallery, is showing altar-like lead tables draped with lead cloths.

What these artists have in common is a desire to invoke the sacred and profane, to both seduce us and sober us up. De Monchaux, whose work has had but one theme for the past 10 years, has built a temple dedicated to sexual desire and the body. In recent art, the body has become a bit of a cliché, but it is also one of art's most enduring themes. De Monchaux does more than play lip service to the subject: she wants, like the late Helen Chadwick, to get under our skins. Her fascination with those places where the outsides of our bodies fold back to reveal something of our inner, visceral selves — the eyes, the mouth, the unhooded penis, the vulva — is not an unalloyed pleasure. It is tinged with a frisson of horror. And it is a fascination that also leaves us feeling guilty. Hence, I suppose, the need to confess.

A death too rational for an irrational world

THEATRE
Michael Billington

WHAT'S WRONG with suicide? The Greeks and Romans believed it could be rationally justified; even the Christian church didn't proscribe it until the sixth century. So why, in an age such as ours that accepts abortion and even the concept of euthanasia, should it still be regarded with such horror? That is the question posed, with great wit and elegance, by Ben Brown's **All Things Considered**, an astonishingly mature first play at London's Hampstead Theatre.

Brown's hero is an Oxbridge philosophy don who decides at 50 that he has had enough. His marriage is over, his mother dead, his major work published. So he decides to kill himself. He reckons, however, without a series of interventions from a disgraced colleague, the college chaplain, a protective librarian, an American academic and even a probing Guardian journalist. It is difficult, Brown concludes, to commit a rational act in an irrational world.

The play allows its hero to argue the case that the choice between life and death should be left to the individual. Against that, it puts the demands of friendship and society.

At times Brown strains one's credulity — it's hard to believe that even an ivory-tower prof would be unaware that his ex-wife had written a bestseller exposing their marriage. But, at a time when many of his generation are exploring the extremes of sex and violence, Brown has written a beautifully balanced comedy of ideas, one that shows suicide to be philosophically sustainable but emotionally self-regarding and cruel.

Alan Strachan's excellent production also makes Christopher Godwin's super-rational hero the still, calm centre of a whirlpool of activity. It is wonderful to watch Godwin's fastidious disdain as Timothy Kightley's cherubic cleric, Michael Lumsden's lecherous don, Holly Hayes's omnivorous American ("I did counselling at Berkeley") and Jane Slavin's insistent reporter all make their immoderate demands.

This is more than a highly promising debut — it also argues the cases for and against self-slaughter better than any English play since Rattigan's The Deep Blue Sea.

Coleridge said that seeing Kean act was like watching Shakespeare by flashes of lightning. The phrase acquired new meaning when the fourth act of the opening night of Henry V at the Globe theatre in London was accompanied by torrential rain, thunderbolts and lightning. Nothing, however, could dampen the spirits of an audience enjoying Richard Olivier's excellent production.

A few things about the Globe need to be changed instantly. Drink should be banned from the auditorium, not on grounds of temperance but so that we don't have to listen to the dreary sound of plastic beakers being crunched underfoot.

Something also has to be done about the officious ushers constantly harrying people, even at moments of high tension, for sitting on the stairs. For my taste, the Globe is also a space that works infinitely better at night, when the gathering dusk, added to the artificial light, creates its own sense of drama.

No work, of course, is better suited to the Globe than Henry V, a play that positively demands our imaginative participation. Single lines acquire new meaning in this space. When John McEnery's Archbishop of Canterbury refers to "the singing masons building roofs of gold", he glances pointedly upwards to the fretted, gilt-edged canopy above the stage.

What also gives life to this production is Mark Rylance's superb Henry, which has exactly the right mix of playfulness and conscience. And the all-male casting proves to be a help rather than a hindrance — not just Toby Cockerell's shyly virginal Katherine but Vincent Brimble's Mistress Quickly, producing a keg of ale from under her skirts, add to the sense of audience engagement.

Pop goes the hype

David Sharrock on U2's poor ticket sales for their world tour

U2, THE world's biggest exemplars of stadium rock and bulwark of the Irish economy in the days before the Celtic Tiger roared, are feeling the cool wind of rejection for the first time.

The group's ambitious "PopMart" stadium tour is failing to live up to the accompanying hype, even though promoters are giving it the full Hollywood blockbuster movie treatment. Three shows have already been cancelled, with speculation pointing to slow ticket sales.

But the worst news for their diehard Irish fans came when it was announced this month that a gig in Dublin's Phoenix Park had been cancelled because of the cost.

Promoter Jim Aiken said there was little prospect of any U2 gig in Dublin this summer. "It was a lovely dream but, when the reality of costs and expenditure dawned on everybody, it should never have been a runner," he said. Calculating "horrendous" costs of $19 million to stage the event, Mr Aiken said that it would have only been viable by charging ticket prices that U2 would not have agreed.

The announcement came amid poor takings in the United States. "About 20 per cent of the dates have been less than overwhelming," admitted Paul Wasserman, U2's publicist in Los Angeles.

A concert in Philadelphia was cancelled. Mr Wasserman said this was because it clashed with a Tibetan Freedom Concert in New York starring REM. But ticket-holders for the show were told a week before that the performance was being cancelled due to poor ticket sales. However, a second Philadelphia show went ahead as planned.

In England it is the same story. Tickets for U2's gigs at London's Wembley — which were like gold dust in their glory days — are still available.

The 62-date PopMart tour, replete with post-modern irony in the shape of McDonald's-style golden arches, giant lemons and 33m toothpicks as well as the world's largest video screen, began in Las Vegas last month to poor reviews. Shows in Denver and San Diego, were about half full. The lavish scale of the tour is costing around $1.6 million a week and has been projected to gross about $480 million.

Drummer Larry Mullen, admitted to music magazine Select: "We've had our problems with PopMart. What we're struggling with is not having the time to think things through, because the album was late and it backed into the tour. We are struggling to get up to par, but by the end of the tour it'll be great."

Sweeties get down and dirty

DANCE
Judith Mackrell

WHEN CLASSICAL ballet tries to do jazz, it frequently does so with an air of self-conscious slumming. Dancers trained for airborne elegance tend to look nervously perky when they attempt to hunker down into real jazz rhythms. They look too delicate to be dirty.

But Duke Ellington's big-band version of Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suite is a gift to any classical choreographer wanting to stray on the wild side. So wickedly and wittily does it push old world fantasy into the dance hall — the Dance Of The Sugar Plum Fairy becoming a saxophone aria to sleaze — that it also allows the dance to shift naturally between those two worlds. David Bintley's The Nutcracker Sweeties, performed by the Birmingham Royal Ballet at the Royal Opera House in London, is a big, brash response to the score, and with its glamour-puss clothes by Jasper Conran, and its flashing neon set, it is visually irresistible.

Bintley's own choreography is a catwalk of jazz styles and there are also some adorable jokes. The Latin American Waltz Of The Flowers is a riot of Come Dancing clichés and the monstrous Floreadoress, baring her smile like a flick knife, is surely the role for which Chenca Williams was born.

So popular has the Sweeties been that Bintley has commissioned two other jazz ballets to accompany it. Bright Young Things, by Oliver Hindle, is set to Gershwin's Piano Concerto in F and depicts a languid world of 1920s flappers and gigolos.

Dressed by David Blight, the dancers look faultlessly elegant, and Hindle flatters them with his fluent vocabulary of holds, natty steps and lifts. Yet, impressive as the work is, it feels as if there's a gap where its imagination should be. The dancers appear no more than a group of walking period mannerisms, bereft of emotion.

Sanctum, by American choreographer Lila York, opens with a young man in white dancing big soulful moves to the second movement of Ravel's Piano Concerto in G, but then switches to a frantic mechanistic group chugging and spinning to Stephen House's Phantasmata. York has said that Sanctum expresses her fears that humanity is being invaded by a technological world. But, in fact, much of the dance is wonderful.

Running through its jazzy clockwork moves are jagged impulses that snag the dancers' bodies, and grinding imploding rhythms both comic and terrifying. When we're finally delivered back to Ravel, the young man looks cheered to find that these machine dervishes have been replaced by serene figures in white.

But unfortunately, when they start dancing, York finds only the most saccharine of ballet moves to give them. Spiritually she might prefer the notion of calm, but choreographically she should stick with technology.

Jazzing up ballet . . . one of the Nutcracker Sweeties

Vicious circle

CINEMA
Derek Malcolm

THE INDIAN cinema is still the most prolific in the world, outmatching Hollywood. But it has had such a bad deal in this country, apart from festival screenings, that anyone could be forgiven for thinking it was either Ray or rubbish. Actually, there's rather a lot in between the often austere Bengali master's work and your average Bollywood song-and-dance epic. Amol Palekar's The Square Circle, for instance.

This film, about a girl abducted on the eve of her wedding and then gang-raped, sounds a little like The Bandit Queen, but it could not be more different. Our heroine falls in not with a bandit but with a lonely transvestite, travelling with him as a man and forming a loving if ultimately tragic relationship.

It was written by Timeri Murari, an old Guardian hand, and not intended as a hybrid between art and commerce. But, in the hands of Palekar, it certainly gets bastardised. He has added songs, changed the ending and inserted a Bollywood-style rape scene.

The Square Circle already has a slightly strange history. The version cinemagoers will see in Britain, which has all but one of the musical numbers taken out, was the one Time magazine's critic nominated as one of its 10 best movies in 1996. The version that was shown at the last London Festival included all the songs, and was hailed as a rare attempt by Bollywood to address a serious subject. Both views are more than a bit askew, largely owing to ignorance about the Indian cinema.

What Time says can't be treated seriously — there are too many flaws in Palekar's conception. And the idea that Bollywood's Hindi cinema should be praised for seeking out the controversial is absurd when a series of great directors like Shataram, Mehboob, Bimal Roy and Guru Dutt took extraordinary risks as far back as the twenties. Still, this is an intriguing film, especially when Murari's script is allowed to take wing.

The key things to know are that a lower-caste woman is disgraced if she is raped, no matter what the circumstances, and that transvestites are a staple diet of the Indian travelling theatre, where men frequently play women. So the woman's acceptance of "a woman trapped in a man's body" is easier than the man's acceptance of her.

Ill met by firelight . . . Nirmal Pandey (left), as the transvestite, soothes Sonali Kulkarni in The Square Circle

By donning men's clothes, the woman learns to achieve her independence in a male-dominated rural world, even though forces well beyond her control are against it. Unfortunately, Palekar makes both the abductors and rapists mere caricatures and pushes the film into pure farce on occasions, in an effort to make the pill less bitter.

Only the lead performances — from Sonali Kulkarni and Nirmal Pandey — ensure that this is a moving story about gender, desire and identity. It is nowhere more so than when Pandey's transvestite ponders not whether he can ever love her but whether he is capable of expressing that love physically.

Johns is one of those small, rough-edged gay movies that suggest homosexuality is tempting a sad fate, not a view many of the gays I know would readily subscribe to. However, Scott Silver's film about a pair of hustlers who team up on the seedier side of Sunset Boulevard is palpably sincere, and certainly well acted by David Arquette as John and Lukas Haas as Donner. John knows the ropes; Donner is the younger and less experienced. Both are regularly beaten up by clients, and the moral of the piece is that your only friend is yourself in circumstances like this.

The film is like a low-budget Midnight Cowboy. As it progresses, you begin to feel that any kind of life would be better than this, and that, since neither are inadequates, they should get out of hustling. The final tragedy thus seems to be their fault — which is not quite what this sloppily thought-out film intends.

Mamma Roma was Pier Paolo Pasolini's second film after Accatone, when he was still hooked on the neo-realism and slightly obvious Christian symbolism he later eschewed.

It's the simple story of a prostitute who moves into another area of Rome, hoping to start a new life with her son. It proves impossible, and the pair are dragged down by poverty and circumstances. The film is probably as accessible as any this potent and poetic director ever made, and that is substantially because he had the services of the great Anna Magnani, an actress you could not possibly ignore.

St Petersburg's opera tsar triumphs against the odds

As Russia stumbles, one institution is thriving. **Andrew Clements** visits a revitalised Kirov

RUSSIA badly needs a few miracles now, especially economic ones, and what Valery Gergiev has achieved in the past 10 years is little short of one. Almost single-handedly, he has turned around the Kirov Opera in St Petersburg and made it one the most vital forces in opera today. That would have been amazing enough in a country that was politically and financially stable. In post-Soviet Russia, where the ground shifts all the time, inflation devours any state subsidy almost as soon as it is awarded, and artists are under constant pressure to cut their losses and pursue hard-currency earnings in the West, it almost defies belief.

British audiences have had plenty of opportunities to witness Gergiev's brilliance as a conductor first-hand in both opera and the concert hall. But on his home territory in the Maryinsky Theatre, where on Boris Yeltsin's direct instructions he has now taken over the Kirov Ballet as well as the Opera, he is even more impressive. Apart from training the orchestra, assembling an astonishing company of principals and conducting most of the performances — a schedule that itself would make most Western conductors blanch — Gergiev is in charge of administration. Cost-effectiveness and efficiency — watchwords in every European opera house these days — are his goals.

But a great company has to have something to perform, and the way in which Gergiev has set about revitalising the Kirov's stock of productions has combined pragmatism with flair.

The Russian staples — Mussorgsky, Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov and Prokofiev — were his natural starting point, in a mixture of new stagings and faithful reconstructions from the company's Tsarist golden age. To watch the Kirov in Glinka's Ruslan And Lydumila, with its sumptuous, meticulously painted backcloths originally seen in 1904, a corps de ballet recreating Fokine's 1917 choreography, and a homegrown cast and chorus that any other house in the world would envy is to experience a century-old tradition.

The production values may be different from those in the West — much of the acting is of the stand-and-deliver variety — but the magnificence of the performances, right down to the smallest role, and Gergiev's absolute control of the musical tension compel attention.

Gradually the repertory is expanding. Mozart, Bizet, Puccini, Strauss and Verdi are already included, and this year he has added perhaps the biggest challenge of all. Gergiev is intent on establishing a tradition of Wagner-singing in the house: there will be a new Flying Dutchman in the autumn, and last month he masterminded Parsifal's first full public staging in Russia.

The composer's prohibition on performances outside Bayreuth meant the first chance to stage Parsifal came in 1913, but the planned Maryinsky production that year had to be scrapped when one of the singers fell ill. After the 1917 revolution, the work's explicit religious content ensured it remained beyond the pale in an officially godless Russia.

This production, then, had to be brand-new. Staged by Tony Palmer, it used designs by the late Yevgeny Lysyk that were originally intended for Lohengrin. Theatrically it wasn't the most rewarding Parsifal to be seen today. But that wasn't the point. This was the first opportunity an intensely curious St Petersburg audience had to experience one of the masterpieces of opera, and they devoured it eagerly and enthusiastically.

It was also the first time Gergiev had conducted the opera, though you'd never have guessed it: the weight and pacing were almost ideal.

Gergiev's cast had strength in depth. Alexey Steblianko may have been a rather stolid Parsifal, but Gennady Bezzubenkov's Gurnemanz was touching and humane, Mikhail Putilin was a terrifying, implacably vengeful Klingsor, and Valeria Stenkina a young and for once genuinely alluring Kundry.

A Western house would have to trawl the world to come up with a Wagner cast as reliable as that, but all these are Kirov house singers who may take the lead in one production and a much smaller role in the next.

It is a method of working that hardly survives in Britain, but it suits St Petersburg and produces astonishing results.

Bob down in the basement

Christopher Ricks

Invisible Republic: Bob Dylan's Basement Tapes
by Greil Marcus
Picador 286pp £16.99

WE OWE God a death, and Greil Marcus owed all God's children a lifework on Bob Dylan. And here it is, one heaven of a book, and well worth having waited for.

It's more than 20 years since Marcus took us on his magical mystery tour, Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock 'n' Roll Music. Now in its fourth revised edition, this rocking rolling ride — Fast Train Coming! — flickeringly lit up Bob Dylan.

So for a long time Marcus has been, in the world of Dylaniana, a bit of a knave, a card. "The only person on the scene missing was the Jack of Hearts." Of course Marcus isn't the only person to have been conspicuously absent, keeping people waiting, wondering, and agog. Dylan himself, when not keeping time, his and ours, takes it too: no album of his very own songs since 1990, Under The Red Sky.

Among the factors that make for a principled tardiness in Dylan's commentators is our man's still being very much alive, himself in train. "I am always glad when one of those fellows dies, for then I know I have the whole of him on my shelf" (Lord Melbourne, speaking of the poet Crabbe). So what can it be that has pricked Greil Marcus at last into doing right by his artist, by himself, and by us? Especially as his burnished attention is levelled here upon those songs of 30 years ago, songs released (some of them) 20 years ago, the bootlegendary Basement Tapes.

The spurs, which are sharp and shining, proved to be Dylan's latest two albums, Good As I Been To You (1992) and World Gone Wrong (1993). Other people's songs, including folk, sung in a voice that is like no other. Dylan was in great voice on both, and those who had written him off, or those others who long for him to write on, all had to admit that he had lost none of his ability to be — when the occasions were right — gnarledly, unsnarlingly poignant. But it has taken Marcus to see how important these two albums are, and why.

For they complete an arc. They call up and call upon the world of the Basement Tapes, that fecund jocund time when Dylan and the Hawks, the Band, were serious as only those fooling around can be. In a Rolling Stone interview in 1969, Dylan laid it out : "They were just fun to do. That's all. They were a kick to do. Fact, I'd do it all again. You know . . . That's really the way to do a recording — in a peaceful, relaxed setting — in somebody's basement. With the windows open . . . And a dog lying on the floor."

What Marcus brings to these songs is a variety of good things: fierce fervour, social convictions, a loving discrimination, never a touch of envy, marination, and an extraordinary ability to evoke in words the very feel (throaty, threatening, thorough, thick with thought . . .) of a man's voice, of this man's voice. Plus a great respect for timing and its indispensable comedy. As Marcus writes of the line *And he — — asked me my name,* "For as long as that little pause holds, with the pause weighting the last word, the singer is still telling this story, writing its script, acting it out; with an edge of amusement he retains his mask, holding his name like a poker player holding his cards to his vest."

Bob Dylan, owed a decent lifework and given a heaven of a book

It comes as a surprise, and then nicely not, when Marcus uses his page to stage a vocal effect, reminding us perhaps of that famous twirl of the stick in Tristram Shandy. He is considering another line, *We carried you / In our arms / On Independence Day:* "Singing slowly, letting the phrases pull him forward against his own fatigue and sorrow, Dylan rocks the words 'Independence Day' like a cradle, into

In
de
Pen
dence
Day."

There is no substitute for affectionate knowledge. Marcus is fascinating in his detailed, quirky evocation of the cornucopious Anthology Of American Folk Music (1952, due out again this year on 3 CDs). I'd simply no idea of how large a part this has played in Dylan's playing, and not only for the Basement Tapes.

Then there is Marcus's rich 40-page annotated discography. Here one really is moved to envy: not only of Marcus's easy happy knowledgeability, his possessing a grounded self-confidence in the face of other men's genius, but his literally possessing these songs, one after another, from some 5 CD bootleg set. How long, O Lord, before we will not have to make do with the official delicious batch plus bits and pieces from the nefarious world of Spanish bootlegging?

Yes, Marcus does go too far (especially in political claims for Dylan), but then again, as T S Eliot said, it is only by going too far that you can find out how far you can go. So what is in order is ungrudging gratitude, to both of the notables audible in Invisible Republic.

If you would like to order this book at the special price of £12.99 contact Books @ The Guardian Weekly

Crime

Lucretia Stewart

Cimarron Rose, by James Lee Burke (Orion, £16.99)

THIS is the first James Lee Burke novel not to feature Dave Robicheaux, Lee Burke's wonderful, self-destructive Bayou hero. But Billy Bob Holland, a clean lawyer in a totally corrupt small Texas town, has more than a few things in common with Robicheaux. Neither fits into the world in which he happens to live. One wonders what world would be exactly right for either man. Billy Bob agrees to defend a boy, who just happens to be his unacknowledged, illegitimate son, Lucas Smothers, accused of rape and manslaughter. Deaf Smith (great name), like many a small town, is crawling with worms. Lucas has been set up to carry the can for them. Lee Burke's writing is rich and stormy, like a late-summer sunset.

The Big Picture, by Douglas Kennedy (Abacus, £9.99)

HIGHSMITH-ISH story of a man who accidentally kills his wife's lover in a fight and then assumes his identity. Ben Bradford always dreamed of being a photographer but things didn't turn out that way and he has ended up a lawyer on a dreary daily commute from Connecticut into New York. His wife Beth wanted to be a novelist but none of her books were accepted for publication. Now she is a resentful mother-of-two, channelling her creativity into furious antique shopping. Ben doesn't know what he's done wrong but he knows he can't do anything right. The discovery of Beth's affair with a nerdy neighbour causes him to flip. Ben lacks the amorality — and therefore the interest — of Highsmith's Tom Ripley, which made his theft of Dicky Greenleaf's life and identity so casual and chilling.

Act of Violence, by Margaret Yorke (Little, Brown, £15.99)

MARGARET YORKE also has similarities to Patricia Highsmith. She is the non-intellectual's Highsmith. From the very beginning, it is clear that things are going to go wrong, that innocent people are going to get hurt and that nothing on earth can be done to prevent what's destined to happen from happening. Her books have a quiet fatalism, rather than the terrible menace of Highsmith's stories, but are almost as frightening.

The Magician's Tale, by David Hunt (Hodder & Stoughton, £14.99)

CREEPY, initially irritating but ultimately gripping novel about a photographer in San Francisco. Kay is an achromat, completely colour-blind. Unsurprisingly, she prefers to shoot in black-and-white. When one of her subjects, a street hustler called Tim, gets murdered, she determines to track down the killer.

Faith on a barren rock

Patrick Marnham

Sun Dancing
by Geoffrey Moorhouse
Weidenfeld & Nicolson 241pp £18.99

ABOUT 13km off the coast of Kerry two rocky islands rise sheer out of the Atlantic. The Skelligs offer practically no shelter from the extreme weather conditions and have no permanent water supply. In winter they can be cut off for weeks at a time.

Yet from the sixth century and for a period of at least 600 years afterwards, Irish monks established a colony on the larger and more exposed of the two rocks. The monks lived in beehive cells carved out of the ground, collected rainwater in underground cisterns, scraped stringy vegetables from one patch of thin soil and, when the weather allowed, netted the occasional fish.

This small community, which probably numbered no more than a dozen men at any one time, followed a punishing rule. In time, Skellig Michael became a celebrated site of European pilgrimage. Then the monastery was abandoned and the endurance and devotion of its members was all but forgotten.

Thirty years ago, Geoffrey Moorhouse caught a glimpse of the Skelligs on a clear summer day from a headland on the Iveragh Peninsula and decided that one day he would visit them. Sun Dancing: A Medieval Vision is an account of his fascination with the Skelligs and his attempt made over nine years to reconstruct the lives of the monks who survived on them for so long.

The book is in two parts, the first a fictional account of the life of the monastery, the second an historical inquiry justifying the fact behind the first. The second part, entitled "The Evidence", contains a wealth of obscure and fascinating information, but it is in the fictional section, "The Tradition", that the book really succeeds. Divided into seven chapters, each set roughly 100 years apart, this describes the inception of the monastery of St Michael the Archangel, its traditions and its death.

The monks quarrel and are corrected by the abbot; they follow the punishing routine of singing the holy office, witness miracles such as a solar eclipse, and, in one of the most effective chapters, suffer a terrifying Viking raid. Some encounter visions, others merely fantasise and are led to self-destruction by the sin of pride.

Moorhouse carries total conviction when relating the monks' very literal faith to their limited understanding of the natural world. In Sun Dancing, on the basis of little direct evidence, he has brought Skellig Michael back to life through the sheer power of imagination. It is an audacious achievement.

Revenge let out of the bottle

Emily Ormond

Waiting for the Healer
by Eamonn Sweeney
Picador 308pp £14.99

"*THE HEALER*" of the title is drink and this is a brilliant study of the rollercoaster effect drinking has on the mind. Thoughts melt into each other, unexpected events loom through the alcoholic brain-fog and life seems to teeter on the edge of disaster.

The novel introduces its narrator, Paul Kelly, at the fag-end of one drunken spree and about to embark on another. The cause of this bid for oblivion is the death of his wife two years earlier and his inability to face up to the responsibility for their small daughter, Kaya.

The colloquial humour and precise, intimate description of location, in this case Brixton in London and, later, Rathbawn in Ireland, as well as a passion for football, bring both Nick Hornby and Roddy Doyle to mind, but Paul's restless intelligence, coherent even after hours of drinking, runs over the conundrums of his life with a bitter wit that is rawer and more visceral than theirs.

He learns that his beloved brother has been murdered in Ireland, and sets off with his daughter on a reluctant journey back to his seamy past on a squalid, poverty-stricken Irish housing estate on the edge of a dump. Sweeney's vivid observations of this place and its inhabitants are darkly comical, achingly familiar down to every crack in the pavement, and Paul's feelings for them are a complex mixture of affection, disgust and despair.

In a permanent drunken haze, Paul waits for the pubs to open in the mornings, along with the other no-hopers. Most of the men in this town seem to live for nothing but drinking; however, the shooting of an old playmate, on the day of his brother's funeral, yanks Paul out of his overwhelming desire to do nothing about his brother's murder. His longing for revenge is stoked by a sinister and violent character, Bumper, who is the antithesis of Paul: a man of action, never words.

They set off on an improvised murder hunt which becomes increasingly grotesque and bloody. Yet despite the cruel setting, Paul's stream-of-consciousness narrative remains wryly humorous and poetic.

This is a captivating and shocking first novel, in which linguistic inventiveness and the keenly observed characterisation of places and people achieve a rare integrity.


We'll have none of that round 'ere . . . a Suffragette is arrested after riots outside Buckingham Palace, 1914

Forward, you Spice Girls

Natasha Walter

A Century of Women:
The History of Women in Britain and the United States
by Sheila Rowbotham
Viking 753pp £20

TWENTY-FIVE years after her first book, Women, Resistance And Revolution, helped to jump-start a new industry of women's history, Sheila Rowbotham slams down her most ambitious work, a history of women throughout the 20th century in both Britain and North America. This new book is a mosaic rather than a narrative. Rowbotham builds up her story by placing vignette next to vignette, voice next to voice; setting the familiar next to the startling, the extraordinary next to the quotidian.

The vignettes are often resonant, begging for more exploration than Rowbotham has time to give them. Take one page where she's getting to grips with women's physical life at the beginning of the century. In one paragraph, Rowbotham rushes from contraception, to methods of abortion, to the observation that "Pregnancy was hazardous and, despite a slow improvement, infant mortality remained high. According to Grace Foakes in her account of life in London's East End . . . when a new baby was born people would ask, 'Has it come to stay?'"

Who, one wants to know, is Grace Foakes? When did she live? Did other women also bear testimony to such a hard family life? And what exactly was the infant mortality rate? There's no time for Rowbotham to tell us, because she's already rushed on to menstruation and then indecent assault — which occurred to Vera Brittain on a train — and then she's back to abortion again, with the observation that a play on the subject was censored in 1906.

When Rowbotham is on the ground she knows and loves best, this energetic style throws up stacks of precious information and insights. She is excellent on the history of working women; from the woman in the herring trade who put a red rag on a broom and went around the yards to get her fellow workers out on strike in 1911, to the Iowan firefighter Linda Eaton, refused permission to breastfeed in the fire station where she worked in 1979. Too often we see the triumphs of women in this century as the work only of a handful of visionaries who crashed into the corridors of power. But Rowbotham reminds us that many of the hardest struggles were not fought by an educated élite but by masses of ordinary women.

Throughout the book, Rowbotham's clear line is that there is no clear line. "Rather than the image of linear progress," she concludes, "the history of women this century can be interpreted as a complex, sometimes conflicting, quest for both personal and social balance."

Women's history in this century is an extraordinary story, the story of a vast, peaceful revolution. That revolution isn't over yet, but it has already transformed every cultural and political landscape.

Throughout the book I found myself itching for Rowbotham to make these successes clearer. She will write brilliantly about the Suffragettes' struggles, and then brush past their monumental victory in one brief sentence.

Rowbotham has chosen to write a history, not a polemic, but I think she could, without skewing the evidence, have written a book that revealed a greater sense of development and even that unfashionable idea, progress. As it is, her book should still become a handbook for the new exponents of girlpower. History matters, even to the Spice Girls. Geri Spice excitedly told an interviewer: "I know about the Suffragettes. They fought. It wasn't that long ago. They died to get a vote. The women's vote. You remember that and you think, fucking hell." Indeed you do.

Tell me about it

Philip Marsden

A Mapmaker's Dream:
The Meditations of Fra Mauro, Cartographer to the Court of Venice
by James Cowan
Hodder & Stoughton 151pp £12

THIS SLIM and enigmatic book is the fictional journal of a 16th century Venetian monk by the name of Fra Mauro. While making little concession either to the style of the period, or to the usual devotional pedantries of monastic jottings, the reconstructed prose is none the less compelling and sure-footed. James Cowan has written a genuinely entertaining book full of strange beasts and far-off places and the oddest of medieval imaginings. Reminiscent of Calvino's Invisible Cities, the book's meditative and aphoristic style is just translucent enough to allow the real point to shine through: the allegory of map-making as spiritual quest.

For Cowan's monk is a cartographer. Cell-bound, afraid of the very earthly extremities he is trying to map, Fra Mauro relies on the assorted merchants and travellers, emissaries and mystics who drift in and out of the Venetian lagoon. His journal is made up of dialogues with these visitors. Their accounts, each one more surprising than the last, force him to reassess not only his own map as it grows, but the whole endeavour of describing the world through the shape of its coastlines, its deserts and mountains.

In discussion with an elderly Jew from Rhodes, Fra Mauro is confounded by the fluidity of man's place on earth; a document from China, the story of a patently virtuous Nestorian missionary, obliges him to question the "discord of belief" and his own Church's branding of the Nestorians as heretics. And how on his map can he possibly represent the simple miracle recounted to him by a salty-bearded merchant — a saint's tomb in Delhi which oozes honey from its stonework? Each of Fra Mauro's informants pulls him a little deeper into doubt. A lightness of touch, coupled with the monk's innocence, enables Cowan to get away with the tricky business of stating big ideas plainly.

At its core, his book is a convincing New Age attack on dualism and the strict division of the world into its physical and spiritual dimensions. Map-making, he is stressing, is a dualistic pursuit, concentrating as it does on the physical nature of the Earth. That Fra Mauro runs into trouble with it exposes the flaw not only of the emerging mechanism of the Renaissance, but the whole principle of good and evil that lies behind his professed faith.

Two chapters in particular bring this dilemma to the fore. At one point, Fra Mauro receives a manuscript from Persia, a record of the teachings of Simon of Taibutheh. A follower of Hippocrates, Simon preaches the equal importance of body and soul. Likewise, a spice merchant tells Fra Mauro of the Yezidis, the mysterious Kurdish group whose cosmology has elements in it that are pre-Zoroastrian (and therefore pre-dualist). Although he falls into the traditional trap of calling them "Devil-worshippers", Cowan is right to emphasise the Yezidis' belief that evil is an integral part of creation.

Medieval Europe was peculiarly receptive to accounts of bizarre places. Travellers such as Marco Polo and William of Rubruck, as well as the classical works of Herodotus, and Strabo, helped fill the distant corners of the Earth with dazzling wonders. That many of the more colourful accounts — the travels of John Mandeville, the letter of Prester John — turned out to be hoaxes, mattered little. It was seen as a measure of divine munificence that the world should be so fantastic, so various. Cowan's little book is an attempt to reclaim that age. It is set firmly in the historical moment when the imagined world was about to be diminished by exploration and its more literal discoveries. Just as Dava Sobel's equally short Longitude is full of awe for an Earth whose dimensions are as yet unknown, so Cowan successfully conveys the spirit of a time when the physical world was still fused with the ethereal.

It was maps like the one Fra Mauro was trying to create that severed that link, that proved in the end that nowhere on Earth do unicorns stand proud in sacred groves, or fabulous potentates wear jewels plucked from the skins of dragons. Cartography as we now know it is quite adequate for our worldly pursuits. The Ordnance Survey or the Times Atlas are ideal handbooks for a utilitarian age. They are the natural heirs of Fra Mauro's map. No wonder he suffered such torment in his cell.

If you would like to order this book at the special price of £9 contact Books @ The Guardian Weekly

Pedestrian road to quiet days in cliché

Kathy Lette

Chasing Cézanne
by Peter Mayle
Hamish Hamilton 245pp £15.99

***PETER MAYLE'S* new book is described as a thriller, and it certainly is thrilling to put it down at the end. The join-the-dots plot involves a Hello! style magazine editor and her unscrupulous art dealer lover, a fake Cézanne, what the blurb worryingly describes as "a rogue's gallery of wonderful characters" and three innocents abroad who eat out a lot.**

The narrative drive limps along in first gear, making mindless detours into unrelated chapters — literary culs-de-sac where the five-star eateries are found. It reads as though the author has cannibalised some of his old restaurant reviews and travel pieces. No writer can have all work and no plagiarism (yes, I've used this line before), it's disappointing in Mayle, because he is capable of so much more.

There are moments when his talent peeks past the pedestrian prose. A receptionist looks up and offers a "token rictus which barely stretched her lipstick". An old man's hand is like "chilled leather". But mostly it's hotel-brochure writing. "Ever since Lord Brougham reinvented Cannes in the 1830s, the coastal strip had been attracting aristocrats and artists, writers and billionaires, fortune hunters, merry widows, pretty girls on the make and young men on the take. . ."

By this stage I was so fed up I'd taken to counting my fillings with my tongue:

"Lyon came and went and the countryside changed from the spring-green curves of Burgundy to the more jagged scenery of the Midi, the vineyards clinging to steep hillsides. . ." I was so bored I could see my plants photosynthesise.

A writer of Mayle's prominence shouldn't touch a cliché with a barge pole. For most of the novel, you are on cliché alert. It is in short, "prosac" — the prose version of Muzak. It's a background sound that washes over the brain. The plodding story (plot points are repeated with metronomic regularity), the lack of emotional development (the only way you'd find out what is going on inside Mayle's characters would be to do open-heart surgery); I've had more fun stuck in a holding pattern above Heathrow next to a talkative salesman.

However, Chasing Cézanne will translate better on the television screen. The story takes off on a dash across France to Cap Ferrat, complete with guns and severed brake cables — scenes that have "prime time" written all over them.

Mayle's magazine editor's credo is to "never, ever say a nasty word about anybody" — obviously a motto I've taken to heart. But this man sells millions of books and is translated into 22 languages. Peter Mayle's advances make Bill Clinton look celibate. So this review is sour grapes. A whole vineyard full.

Black, gifted and snubbed

They love Tiger Woods at Congressional now but, **David Davies** recounts, the 'Queen of Negro Golf' was not so welcome

CONGRESSIONAL Country Club. The very name is resonant of politics and of power, the twin obsessions that drive the nearby capital city, Washington.

The host club of this year's US Open has served as the playing ground for the nation's most prominent citizens since it opened in 1924, with four presidents including Woodrow Wilson and Calvin Coolidge among those who became life members. From the start it was the place to play and to practise a little light political dealing. If you are in, and of, Congressional, you are somebody.

In the run-up to this championship, the United States Golf Association (USGA) press office sent out seven pages crammed with every conceivable fact about Congressional. But there was not a single word about one of the most shameful acts of racism ever to occur in golf, which took place at the US Women's Amateur at Congressional in 1959.

It was inflicted on Ann Gregory, who was good enough to compete at national level but who was black, and it was inflicted by the bigots who then formed Congressional's committee.

Raised in Gary, Indiana, Gregory learned the game on a public park that had a nine-hole short course, on which blacks were allowed, and a full 18-hole course, on which they were not.

One day Gregory, fed up with the discrimination, told the green-fees official: "My tax dollars are taking care of that big course as well as this little one and there's no way you can bar me from it. Just send the police out to get me." She went out to play on the big course and her right to do so was never again questioned.

She was, then, accustomed to the rampant racism that existed in those years. The Caucasians-only clause on the men's US Tour was still in place in 1959, and would not be rescinded for another two years, though the USGA to its credit had started accepting Gregory's entry for the women's amateur championship in 1956.

Ann Gregory takes silver from boxer Joe Louis

At that time she was known as "the Queen of Negro Women's golf", having won the national title of the United Golf Association, an organisation for black players. She had also won the Joe Louis Invitational, the former boxer having become a keen player after retirement.

Gregory, by any golfing criteria, belonged. But by the social standards of the day she was at best a curiosity and at worst an outcast.

That was how Congressional must have made her feel in 1959. In those days, though the golf was important, the socialising was a very considerable part of any championship, and the biggest part of that was the eve-of-championship dinner. The tradition was that all the participants were invited, and at Congressional they all were, with the exception of Gregory.

It fell to Joe Dey, the USGA executive director, to break the news to Gregory. "They have decided," he said, "that you are not to have dinner with them."

Nowadays any such decision would excite a huge media outcry. In 1959, though, the bigots at Congressional got away with it. There was meek acceptance by the USGA, no revolt from the players and complete media indifference.

Gregory had the longevity to be expected of a good golfer, and in 1971 she nearly won the US Women's Senior Amateur. She died in 1990, aged 77, and the trophies she won are now at Golf House, home of the body that once acquiesced in blatant racism, the United States Golf Association.

A million Arabs' hopes followed Hapoel Taibe into Israeli football's first division. But the teams fate reflects the uphill battle faced by Arab Israelis, writes **Dan Goldberg**

Caught in the crossfire

INSIDE TAIBE, about 40km north of Tel Aviv, unmistakable signs abound that you have entered an Arab town. Apart from the minaret of the mosque and the wailing cry of the muezzin's call to prayer, the community lacks infrastructure: the general decay and the deterioration of the roads, footpaths and sewers, coupled with the lack of public amenities, graphically illustrate that this is Arab Israel.

Even the town's football club is in disarray. Hapoel Taibe, the first Arab club to play in the Israeli National League — the equivalent of the English Premiership — after being promoted in 1996, have had a roller-coaster season that ended in relegation.

Founded in 1961, Hapoel Taibe began on the Israeli League's lowest rung, the Sixth Division, and began climbing the ladder. However, their stadium, built a decade ago when Taibe played in the Third Division, is curiously located at the end of a steep, dirt track high above the town, on a hill that doubles as the local refuse tip.

"It's not even good enough for the Third Division," said Rifat "Jimmy" Turk, Israel's most celebrated Arab footballer of yesteryear and now Taibe's manager. Not surprisingly, their pitch was deemed unsuitable for National League football, forcing them to travel each week to one of three other stadiums, leaving the club and supporters homeless — like many Arab refugees after Israel's 1948 War of Independence and the Six Day War of 1967.

While Taibe's 28,000 residents are loyal Israelis, there is little doubt about the gulf separating Jew from Arab in this complex state. That it took 65 years for an Arab team to reach the 16-strong National League is a measure of their status as second-class citizens. So Taibe's relatively small step from the Second Division to the National League was a giant leap for Israel's Arabs, a fifth of the population. Inevitably, though, the halfway line became a battle frontline and the pressure cooker of the Israeli-Arab conflict boiled over on to the football pitch.

The origins of league football in Israel are found in 1932, when Palestine was still under the British Mandate. This season, almost 50 years after the creation of the state of Israel, Hapoel Taibe finally put Arab football on the local map and became the flag bearers for Israel's 1 million Arabs, including the 100,000 nomadic Bedouin in the Negev Desert.

The honeymoon, however, was shortlived — and not without its dramas. Taibe began with a roller-coaster ride, securing two victories in four outings that put them in a respectable seventh place. But that was as good as it got. From that point, they found themselves aboard a big dipper. Their failure to score a goal in 684 arid minutes brought the threat of relegation and before the turn of the year they were 16th and bottom — with one foot already back in the Second Division. A six-month spell without a single win then sealed their fate.

Enmity between rival supporters had flared even before Taibe reached the National League. Soon, the names of infamous Jewish and Arab fanatics could be heard intermittently among the songs and



Jew meets Arab: Beitar's captain Eli O'hana gives a Taibe player the elbow during a game in Jerusalem

chants at Taibe's matches. That a Jewish doctor, Baruch Goldstein, and an Arab engineer, Yahya Ayyash — both men who killed innocent civilians in an attempt to derail the peace process — became icons within the football stadiums of Israel indicates the sordid level to which the politics in football had sunk.

Then Taibe arrived in Jerusalem, a microcosm of this seemingly intractable conflict. The capital was charged with political undercurrents that day — and not solely because the Arabs of Taibe were coming to town. The day before the match, a Palestinian suicide bomber from the West Bank had blown himself up in a crowded cafe in Tel Aviv, killing three people and wounding dozens more. Beitar Jerusalem, feared for the footballing skills that had taken them to the top of the League, are equally renowned for their fanatical, rightwing supporters. Sensibly, few Taibe fans braved the journey.

CHANTS of "Death to the Arabs" and "Terrorists" preceded a small-scale, post-match riot as the Jews of Jerusalem stoned the little band of Arabs from Taibe as they departed, leaving three injured. On the pitch, almost incidentally, Jerusalem crushed Taibe 5-0, a result that accurately reflected the 48-point gap between top and bottom.

As their season went from bad to worse, events took a tragic turn. On April 4, Turk read out the line-up for a match Taibe had to win to have any chance of avoiding relegation. Selecting Wahib J'barra, just returned from a two-match suspension, Turk said: "I'm giving you a chance and I want you to take it." J'barra, aged 22, replied: "You know that for this team I'm ready to die on the pitch." No one could have imagined that J'barra's words were prophetic; after 34 minutes, he collapsed from heart failure and died on the way to hospital. The whole of Israel's Arab sector went into mourning that week. Taibe fell silent after the tragedy that had befallen them.

As if to add insult to injury, Toto, Israel's equivalent of the football pools, removed Taibe's name from their card game that same week. The club had failed to register a victory in six months. The following week, in a match billed by supporters as a tribute to J'barra, Taibe scored an emotional 1-0 victory, and their fans chanted: "With blood, with spirit, we'll save your soul, Wahib."

At that stage, however, Taibe's chances of staying up were remote. But, if nothing else, at least they could now go down with dignity.

To succeed, Turk argues, Arab players must have proper working conditions, training facilities must be improved, stadiums must be renovated, chairmen must become more professional, and much, much more money must be invested.

But would that alter the blatant racism between opposing sets of supporters that blurred the border between politics and football? "As a player here in the seventies and eighties, I got stick in every game — even playing for the national team," laments Turk. "Now as a manager, 20 years on, it's still, sadly, the same. If you look at England 20 years ago, black players also had a really hard time. Today, however, almost every top Premiership team has a selection of quality black players. I really want it to get better, but I don't believe it will."

After their brief flirtation with fame, Turk and his team officially return to play next season in the Second Division, where, for the first time, there will be three Arab teams competing.

Yet the hill Taibe have to climb to their ramshackle stadium is [illegible] compared to the mountain that [illegible] as part of Arab football as a [illegible] must conquer before they can [illegible] erly challenge — let alone dom[illegible] — domestic football in Israel [illegible]

Perhaps by the time they [illegible] that peak, peace, too, will [illegible] come to Israel and the rest [illegible] Middle East. — *The Observer*

Motor Racing Canadian Grand Prix

Schumacher takes short cut to victory

Alan Henry in Montreal

A SPECTACULAR 140mph accident, which left the Frenchman Olivier Panis struggling to escape from the shattered remains of his Prost-Mugen-Honda with two broken legs, brought the Canadian Grand Prix to a premature end here last Sunday with 14 of its 69 laps left to run.

The incident overshadowed a fortunate victory for Michael Schumacher's Ferrari, a success that catapulted the German driver back into a seven-point lead in the world championship after the pre-race favourite Jacques Villeneuve spun his Williams into the wall while in second place at the end of the second lap.

Villeneuve admitted: "I made a big mistake. The track was very slippery but I just misjudged the corner. I'm totally disappointed because we had a strong car."

The most bitter disappointment was that of the McLaren driver David Coulthard, whose prospects of beating Schumacher were wrecked when his car stalled with clutch problems no fewer than three times at a final, unscheduled tyre stop in a race blighted by high rates of tyre wear.

Schumacher had produced a dazzling drive to edge out Villeneuve from pole position on the final lap of qualifying, and he made use of that advantage to accelerate into an immediate lead as the pack jostled into the first tight left-hander. Further back, Eddie Irvine became embroiled in energetic wheel-banging, with the result that his Ferrari was propelled backwards on to the grass and out of the race, a fate shared by the tail-ender Jan Magnussen's Stewart-Ford a couple of corners later.

Schumacher stormed through at the end of the opening lap 1.4sec ahead of Villeneuve, the French-Canadian being willed on by the 120,000-strong crowd. But the magnitude of the occasion proved too much. Coming into the final S-bend to complete the second lap, he allowed the Williams to slide a little off-line as he swung into the first right-hander.

In a flash the rear end was sliding out of control. He tried to slam on a corrective steering lock but the situation was beyond salvation. The Williams half-spun into the outside wall, taking the full force of the impact against its left front wheel. There was nothing left but for Villeneuve to release his harness and walk away, punching his helmet in disbelief that he could have made so elementary an error.

This left Schumacher nursing a 1.8sec lead over Giancarlo Fisichella's Jordan, Jean Alesi's Benetton and the McLaren-Mercedes of Coulthard. Then on the seventh lap Schumacher had a potentially disastrous setback. Ukyo Katayama spun into the barrier on the back leg of the circuit, forcing the safety car to be deployed while the Minardi was removed. This cost Schumacher his four-second lead, so when the green flag signalled the restart two laps later he had to start work again.

Crash victim . . . the wreck of Oliver Panis's Prost-Mugen-Honda is removed from the track
PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MARSH

For the next five laps the young Italian Fisichella kept pace with the leading Ferrari, but gradually Schumacher asserted his advantage and he eased into a 3.4sec lead by the end of the 20th lap.

With Schumacher's Ferrari edging away, the battle for second place heated up. On the 25th lap Fisichella and Alesi came in for their first pit stops together but the Frenchman's Benetton got out just ahead. On the 28th lap Schumacher made the first of two scheduled stops, allowing Coulthard's McLaren — running on a one-stop strategy — through into the lead.

Coulthard stayed out until the end of the 40th lap before heading in for tyres and fuel. That put Schumacher back in front, but the Ferrari was in for its second stop at the end of the 44th lap, resuming in second place. McLaren's strategy seemed set to pay off as Coulthard went back into the lead, but blistered tyres meant he had to follow Schumacher's example and make an extra stop on the 52nd lap. With only 17 laps left to run, the McLaren's engine stalled and Coulthard's gallant effort was over.

On the same lap that Coulthard pitted, Panis's accident brought out the safety car once again and, when the gravity of the situation was appreciated, the race was red-flagged to a halt with Schumacher back in the lead.

Sports Diary Mike Kiely

Graf bows out of Wimbledon

THIS YEAR'S Wimbledon championships will be missing one of the game's greats after reigning champion Steffi Graf pulled out of the tournament because of a chronic knee injury for which she underwent surgery in Vienna.

If Graf is to return to the game she faces a long period of rehabilitation, a fact not lost on the 28-year-old German, who later hinted that she may decide to quit: "I could retire without any problem. It is something I'm considering very seriously."

Meanwhile the off-court problems regarding Graf's financial affairs, which saw her father Peter convicted earlier this year for evading payment of $7.3 million in tax, were brought to a close after the Mannheim chief district attorney, Hubert Jobski, announced that there would not be any further investigation. In return, Graf has agreed to pay $760,000 to the state and charitable causes.

British number one Tim Henman is set to become the first home-based player to be seeded at Wimbledon since Buster Mottram in 1982. Henman's latest ATP world ranking is number 20, and with six higher-ranked players already out of the championships he may well be seeded as high as 14.

TO THE strains of We are the Champions, England's footballers lifted the trophy as winners of the Tournoi de France in the Parc des Prince. However, manager Glenn Hoddle's delight will have been tempered by the sight of his men coming off decidedly second best to Brazil. Although the South Americans' margin of victory was a slim one, Romario scoring the only goal, their superiority was clearly evident. Meanwhile England's chances of reaching the World Cup finals in France next year improved after Poland defeated Georgia 4-1 in Katowice.

On the domestic front, defeated FA Cup finalists Middlesbrough have abandoned their struggle for reinstatement to the Premiership, but chairman Steve Gibson has called for an independent inquiry into the events surrounding the deduction by the FA Premier League of three points following Boro's failure to fulfill a fixture at Blackburn Rovers last December. The punishment ultimately cost the side their place in the top flight.

Two Norse men, attracted to these shores by stories of the Premiership's legendary warriors Wimbledon, completed a smash and grab raid. The Norwegians reportedly paid $50 million for a controlling stake in the club.

Bobby Robson's hopes of lifting the Spanish championship in his first season at Barcelona disappeared after Real Madrid secured the title with a 3-1 victory over city neighbours Atletico.

ENGLAND'S men's hockey team were put firmly in their place by Olympic champions the Netherlands in the Rabobank Quadrangular tournament, losing 5-0 in Rotterdam. Earlier, manager David Whittle's side had pulled off an impressive 4-3 win over Pakistan while their final game, against South Africa, ended in a 2-2 draw leaving England a respectable second in the four-nation competition.

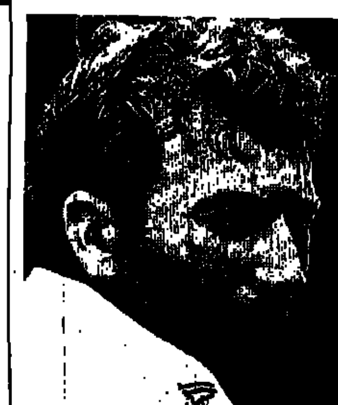
CRICKET saluted a new knight after former England batsman Colin Cowdrey was included in the Queen's birthday honours list. The current England skipper Michael Atherton received an OBE.

Meanwhile the national team's impressive start to the Ashes series was reflected by the fact that the team to face Australia in the second Test at Lords will be unchanged, chairman of selectors David Graveney confirmed. The side is: Atherton, Butcher, Stewart, Hussain, Thorpe, Crawley, Ealham, Croft, Gough, Caddick, Malcolm, Hollioake, Tufnell.

If further proof were needed that this is not the time to be Australian in Britain, Derbyshire coach Dean Jones announced he was leaving the club after dressing-room unrest made his position untenable.

Jones said he planned to return to Melbourne, and added: "As someone who has always put winning and enjoyment as the paramount reasons for playing cricket, I can no longer accept the current situation."

In the County Championship, Glamorgan were bowled over by Middlesex, losing by an innings and seven runs. The Welsh side's second innings was over in only 76 minutes and 96 balls, and their total of 31 was the lowest recorded at the Sophia Gardens ground, and the side's second lowest in Wales.



Atherton . . . awarded OBE

AMERICAN fighter Oscar de la Hoya proved once and for all he is more than just a pretty face, demolishing Kenya's David Kamau to retain his World Boxing Council welterweight title in Texas. "My left hook is a power punch," said the 24-year-old pin-up boy of the ring, who won inside two rounds.

IT MUST have seemed like just another day at the office for Michael Jordan as the Chicago Bulls clinched the NBA championship, defeating the Utah Jazz 90-86. The Illinois-based team have now triumphed five times in the last seven years, and Jordan was the highest scorer for Chicago, averaging 32.3 points per game in the series.

[illegible] Shiv Sharma is on holiday

Tennis

Philippoussis serves up a poor show

Stephen Bierley at Queen's

IT COMES to something — entertainment is the usual word — when a ball-girl steals the show, but so it was last Sunday at the Stella Artois final when Goran Ivanisevic handed his racket to 14-year-old Amy Kavanagh midway through the second set and asked her to face the venomous, cobra-spitting service of Australia's Mark "The Scud" Philippoussis.

Here was a touch of light relief in a 53-minute match achingly devoid of anything that might have sneaked its way over the net and proclaimed itself as subtlety. Philippoussis won 7-5, 6-3, which just about says everything. He opened with three successive aces and thereafter rallies were an endangered species — until, that is, young Amy made her surprise entrance.

While Ivanisevic looked on with some admiration, she exchanged 17 powder-puff strokes with the huge Australian after he had dollied over a serve too slow for the electronic eye to record.

At the time the score was 3-3 with Philippoussis 40-0 up. On resumption of what passed for normal play he immediately double-faulted and then netted a forehand volley.

Had he not then whanged down another ace, Ivanisevic's little joke might have taken on an altogether more sinister aspect. There is no doubt it temporarily broke the 20-year-old Australian's concentration; had he lost his serve, a little frivolity might have swiftly turned to justifiable anger. "But it was good for the crowd," Philippoussis conceded.

"It's the nearest I came to breaking him," said the Croatian with a large grin. In fact, his best chance came at 4-4 in the second set when, with the score at 30-30, Ivanisevic overhit a passing shot for a break point. He never really went close again.

This was Philippoussis's first grass-court title and his third overall this year. What is more, he followed this singles win with victory in the doubles where he partnered his fellow Australian Pat Rafter to a 6-2, 4-6, 7-5 victory over Sandon Stolle and Cyril Suk in a rain-delayed final.

Philippoussis first rushed to public attention at the Australian Open last year when he dispatched Pete Sampras in three cyclonic sets. The world No 1, beaten here in the quarter-finals, has since taken ample revenge, notably in the second round of Wimbledon last year, but Philippoussis threatens to be an extremely dangerous man when the tournament begins on Monday.

"I'm dangerous too . . . but I don't know for what," said Ivanisevic, who has twice lost the Wimbledon final, in 1992 against Andre Agassi and two years later against Sampras. Indeed last Sunday's final was about as interesting as that sterile 1994 contest.

King of swing . . . Els displays his trophy PHOTOGRAPH: MIKE BLAKE

Golf US Open

Els holds off Montgomerie

David Davies in Bethesda

ERNIE ELS, elegantly casual, faced a four-footer for the US Open last Sunday and holed it. He won the title for the second time, just outplaying Colin Montgomerie over the last two holes of the Congressional Country Club.

With a total of 276, four under par, he beat Montgomerie by a single shot. The two had been locked together for most of the final round, but Els eased ahead of the Scot and the Open champion Tom Lehman with a magnificent shot at the 17th.

It was a bitter disappointment for Montgomerie, who led twice in the final round and who had lost a play-off to Els in the 1994 event. He has now had two second-place finishes and a third in the US Open, an event he has called his favourite. Els won $460,000, Montgomerie $270,000.

The back nine on Sunday is where the players themselves believe that it all begins, and with two proven champions in Els and Lehman, and with Montgomerie a frequent contender, there were some heavyweights about. Maggert, whose sole US Tour win was in the Walt Disney Classic four years ago, appeared to be out of place.

Montgomerie and Els played the 466-yard par-four 10th in disparate ways. The Scot needed to hole from 15 feet for his par; Els, who dropped a shot at the par-five 9th by missing the green with a wedge, made up for it by holing a 40-foot chip for a birdie.

Now all four contenders were level at four under, but only because Lehman missed a six-footer for a birdie at that hole, an error he was to repeat at the 11th and which, by his body language, he realised might cost him dear.

Els was the first to break out of the deadlock, hitting a magnificent tee-shot at the short 12th and holing the nine-footer to go five under. But that proved too rarefied a position for the South African and he dropped back at the very next hole with a bogey.

He almost dropped another shot at the next, the 14th, driving into a bunker and then hitting the green some 55 feet from the pin. His first putt was 10 feet short, but he saved par.

Montgomerie was not without his difficulties at the same hole. His second was pushed, finishing in deep rough, and he did extremely well to get it on the green eight feet away. Like Els he made par.

All four were struggling, not only for pars but for breath in the hot, humid and still conditions, and Lehman, so assured when he won at Royal Lytham St Annes, was having problems like the others. He missed the green at the 14th in a horrible place; the ball settling into the rough on the bank of a bunker, and he did quite well to get it to 20 feet. The par putt was never close.

He was now a stroke behind Montgomerie and Els, but he caught them up at the long 15th, where he hit a really good wedged third to three feet for a birdie. It was essential he stayed at that mark to put the pressure on the two leaders ahead of him, but he could not [...] missed the green at the 16th in a[...] other almost impossible posi[tion,] could only chip to 15 feet a[nd] missed that one too.

By now Maggert had done wh[at] he was expected to do, dropp[ing] back to two under, and shortly a[fter]wards Lehman did something co[m]pletely unexpected, splashing do[wn] in the lake at the 17th to lose [his] chance of victory.

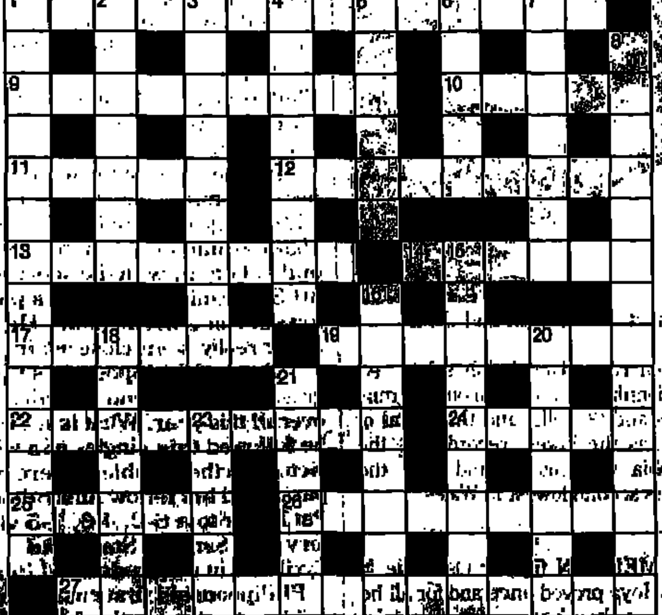
Els, in sharp contrast, had hit [one] of the shots of the championship [at] the 17th, a monster par-four of [...] yards. His second flew straight [at] the pin, pitched 10 feet from [the] hole and finished the same dista[nce] away. Montgomerie, needing to e[m]ulate that, found the fringe rou[...] chipped wonderfully to six feet [...] then, after holing so many meani[ng]ful putts, missed the one that m[at]tered most.

Tiger Woods finished with a [...] for a disappointing six-over-par to[tal] of 286. The young Masters cha[m]pion got off to a bad start on Thu[rs]day last week with a 74, but in [the] second round birdied four of [the] first seven holes to complete [the] outward nine in 31. Despite a de[lay] for rain, he finished with an impr[es]sive three-under 67 to set himself [up] for a realistic challenge for the tit[le].

However, in the third round [he] finished with a 73 that include[d a] double-bogey at the third.

Reflecting on his tournam[ent,] Woods said: "This US Open hu[m]bled me . . . But I learned a lot. [I] did make some mental mistakes [out] there and I'll rectify that so I sh[all] never make them again."

Cryptic crossword by Auracaria



Across

1 [illegible]

17 Coastal resort, part of Tyneside, to a T (6)

19 Ship's heel over (4,4)

24 Prize for writing readable verse (5)

[illegible]

Down

1 I had two men with small feet to give the defendant his rights (5,9)
2 Feeling aroused by myself and to myself (7)
3 Request to fetch butter seems to annoy me (3,2,4)
4 I love variety, love being first pupil, and can cook (5,3)
5 Get away from the church — it's woolly (6)
6 Head of church I effectively manage (6)
7 Head keeping front page in view (7)
8 Apple pudding needs a lot of apple, sponge and cream (9,6)
15 Top coat for a prince as a babe? (5,4)
16 Austen's work, and it's found in back numbers (8)
18 Pigeon spreading disease? (7)
20 Home before six with new cat: Unbeaten is her name (7)
21 Altitude, top to bottom, is 125 (6)
23 Paper rubber? (5)

Last week's solution

Rugby Union Tour Match: Natal 12 British Lions 42

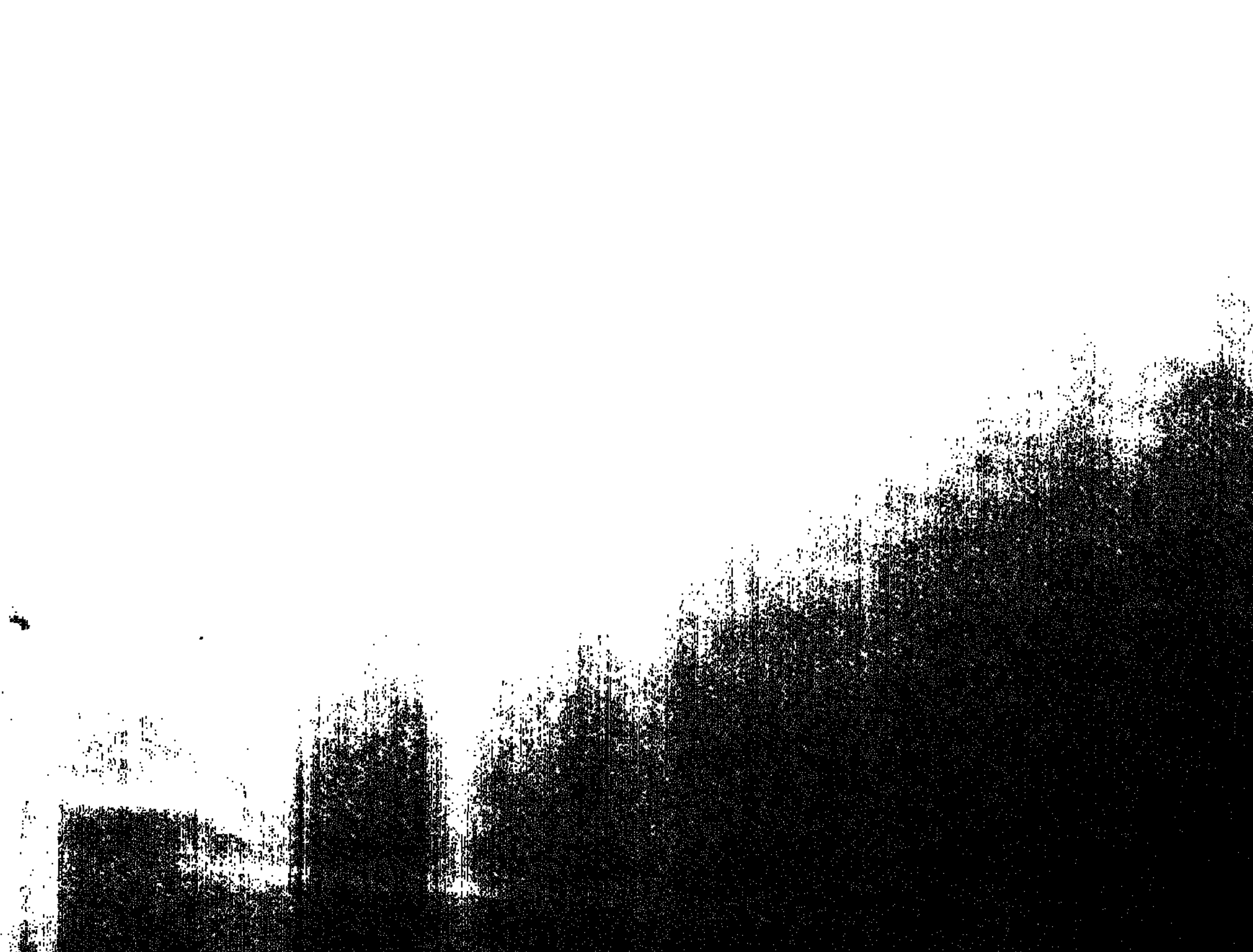
Lions look in shape for Test

Robert Armstrong in Durban

THE DISLOCATED shoulder that ended Robert Howley's *tour may have cast a cloud over* the Lions' display here at King's Park, but there was a silver lining in the number of players who made irresistible cases to play in the first Test against the Springboks in Cape Town this weekend.

If the demolition of Natal by a record margin demonstrated anything it was that the Lions need Neil Jenkins, one of the world's most reliable goalkickers, as well as loose forwards who can defend in depth and overcome the illegal spoiling tactics of the opposition.

Jenkins, who was voted Most Valuable Player by a South African television station, might not have the vision of a mature Test full-back but the quality of his general play here suggested he has made the move from No 10 to No 15 with some distinction. And his goalkicking, which yielded 24 points, put the Lions [illegible]



over, although Allan Bateman lasted only 26 minutes before a pulled hamstring forced the centre off. Catt, who replaced him, *embellished a controlled mid*field display with a splendid piece of finishing five minutes from time from Townsend's neatly judged garryowen.

In the last minute, the Lions rounded off victory with an elegant try by the ubiquitous Dallaglio. He stood off a ruck on the right corner and then glided forward to accept a short pass from Dawson before crossing the line without hindrance.

Earlier Townsend plundered a first-half try, leaving the Natal full-back Gavin Lawless trailing as he surged forward to touch down Wood's high kick. The Lions' fly-half also dropped a sweet goal from 35 yards.

Long before the end Natal's persistent attempts to halt the Lions' progress by killing the ball, standing offside and diving over the top had tarnished their reputation for creating quick continuous movement.

[illegible]